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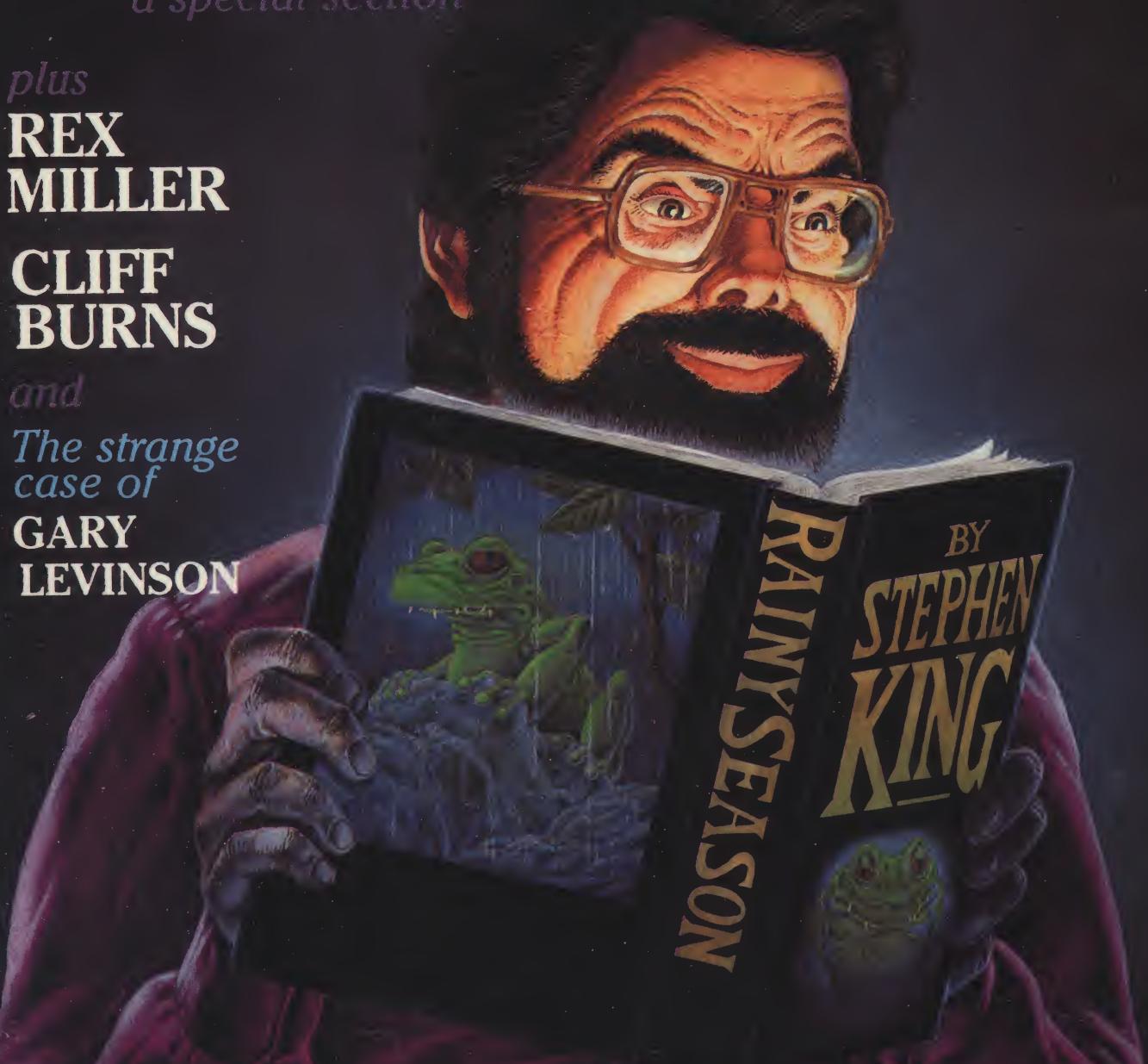
a special section

plus

**REX
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**CLIFF
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and

*The strange
case of*
**GARY
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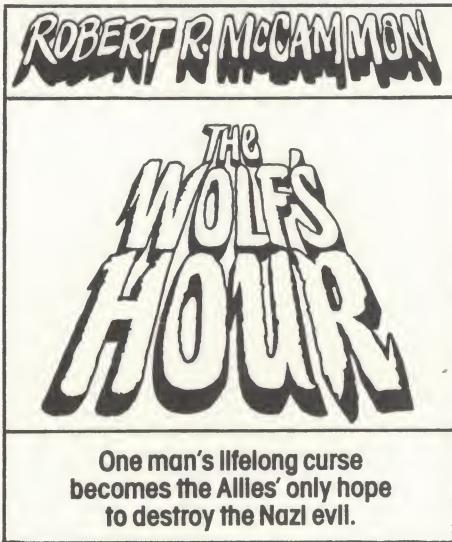


A detailed illustration of Stephen King. He is shown from the chest up, wearing dark-rimmed glasses and a mustache. He is looking directly at the viewer with a slight smile. He is holding an open book in front of him with both hands. The book cover features a green frog and the title "RAINY SEASON" in large, serif capital letters, with "BY STEPHEN KING" written above it. The background is dark and moody, with some glowing green and blue light around the book and King's face.

RAINY SEASON
BY STEPHEN KING

HELLO MIDNIGHT GRAFFITES!!

We're the SUPERSTORE of the FANTASTIC and HORROR you've been looking for!! We offer a variety of authors such as Stephen King, Dean R. Koontz, Robert R. McCammon, Joe R. Lansdale, Ray Garton, John Farris, Clive Barker, and MORE!!! We stock 1st edition hardcovers, paperbacks, foreign editions, magazines, newspapers, cassettes, videos, LPs and autographed editions, many signed especially for the Overlook Connection. We aren't just a catalog with a line and a price! We feature information about your favorite authors and their new releases. Our Nov. '88 catalog carried a full page of holiday greetings from the likes of Dean Koontz, Robert R. McCammon, Joe Lansdale, Richard Christian Matheson and Ray Garton. We hope to carry on our tradition of great surprises in '89 with stories and interviews so don't delay! To receive our FREE catalog drop us a line at the Overlook Connection, P. O. Box 526, Woodstock, Georgia 30188 or give us a call during business hours (6-12 p.m. Mon-Fri & 12-12 Sat-Sun) at (404) 926-1762 and ask for me! Oh by the way, My name's Dave and I'm damn glad to meet ya!!!



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SPECIAL



Stephen King



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C O N T E N T S

F R O M B E Y O N D

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plus HEADLINES you may have missed.

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From the publishers

Mr. Jessie Horsting
Mr. James Van Hise
Midnight Graffiti
14156 Tobission Road
Poway, California 92064

Dear Mssrs. Horsting and Van Hise,

Enclosed is a short story, "Rainy Season," which I thought might be
right for Graffiti. It's pretty gross.

Thanks for the reading.

Sincerely,

Stephen King
Bangor, Maine 04401

What would you have done?



THIS ISSUE

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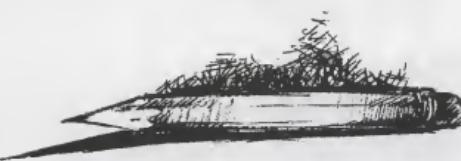
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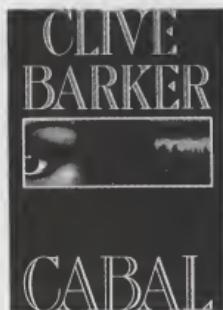
OK STEPHEN KING FANS, THIS ISSUE contains almost forty pages for you to sink yer teeth into—stories, art, fun and info. But wait, there's more.

We've been fans of Rex Miller since last year when his first novel *Slob* was published, featuring the fun and frolics of Daniel "Chaihang" Bunkowski, a psycho for the eighties. Rex offers a prequel of sorts this issue, a short piece of havoc called "Sweet Pea." We'd also like to introduce Canadian writer Cliff Burns who debuts on these pages with "Cattletruck," a bittersweet post-holocaust story that we couldn't resist. Cliff is a writer that we think you'll be seeing a lot of in the future.

Zombies on Broadway will return next issue—Ted Sturgeon continues and we have loads more: Art by Mark Nelson, whose work on the *Aliens* series from Dark Horse Comics is turning heads (and stomachs) everywhere, Marcus Alan Nickerson, Mahon Fawcett, *True Life Horrors* returns with Donald Farmer's incisive look at the strange case of Gary Levinson, plus news, reviews, subliminals [BUY THIS MAGAZINE] letters [STEPHEN KING] and the regular mayhem [BUY TWO COPIES].



From Beyond



TWILIGHT ZONE: R. I. P.

Viacom International has pulled the plug on *Twilight Zone Magazine*, published bi-monthly since 1981. *TZ* was a watershed publication which found, at least for a while, a broad market for the skewed world view popularized by Rod Serling. The magazine went through a few editors (T.E.D. Klein, Michael Blaine and Tappan King), a few format refittings and, for the last few issues, a retrograde search for its roots before folding. The April issue will be its last. Editor Tappan King has been offered a teaching position in the southwest and Carol Serling, the ombudsman of *TZ*, will go on being Carol Serling.

Bye bye, *TZ*. We'll miss you.

Clive Barker set a new genre record for jet lag when his schedule, ancien with his latest book, *Cabal*, and film *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* caused him to make a transatlantic trip—London-NYC-LA and back—about once every ten days. The pilot script for *Spirit City, USA*, co-written by Barker and Mick Garris, has been rejected by ABC-TV and is now under consideration by both CBS and Fox TV for the 1989-90 season.

Mick Garris will script and direct *In The Flesh* for Warner Brothers from the Clive Barker story of the same title. Filming started in January. Barker, meanwhile, will direct his next film, *Night Breed* (based on *Cabal*) in Paris and Canada for Morgan Creek, the company responsible for *Dead Ringers*...which is apt since David Cronenberg has agreed to play a major badguy role in the film.

Apart from the "Chrysalis" gag, *Fly II* bears no resemblance to Garris' original script for the sequel, which he subtitled *The Insect Awakes*.

The Books Of Blood series for HBO has been postponed while co-producers Barker and Garris make movies. Work will resume in the next year or so, with an initial commitment of three episodes, all derived from new Barker story ideas.

Freddy's Nightmares is a hit despite being labeled the most disgusting program in the history of broadcast television.

CBS is attempting to



buy the show in order to shore up its abysmal prime-time ratings. The stip: No censorship, no script approval, and no staff changes. Oughta be weird. Now if they can only come up with more stories with endings that make sense...

David J. Schow has completed his new novel, *The Shaft*, after putting it down a spell to script "Safe Sex" for *Freddy's Nightmares*, to be directed by Tim (River's Edge) Hunter. Schow describes the novel as "a tale of an apartment building with Ahlzeimer's..."

Schow has also commenced the script for *Leatherface: Chainsaw Massacre III* for New Line.

John Skipp and Craig Spector, by the time you read this, should have completed their first draft of *A Nightmare On Elm Street Part 5: The Dream Pool* for New Line, to be filmed in April 1989. Their *Book Of The Dead* project has finally been turned in to Bantam; look for a Summer 1989 paperback release, slightly preceded by a limited edition from Mark Zcising.

Richard Christian Matheson inadvertently started a bidding war between Warner Books and Doubleday for the rights to his first novel, *Created By*. Look for it in hardcover sometime in 1990.

Toni McLaughlin, director of *One Dark Knight*, *Friday The 13th Part 6*, and *Date With An Angel*, has signed onto the *Friday The 13th* series as a story consultant.

Hot Blood: The Anthology Of Provocative Horror, edited by Jeff Gelb and Lon Friend, will be out from Pocket Books in April 1989. Featured are reprint stories from Richard Christian Matheson, John Skipp & Craig Spector (who attended *The Fly II* to pick up tips on being fused into one body), David J. Schow and Harlan Ellison. Original stories include "The Thang" by Robert R. McCammon, "The Voice" by Rex Miller, "Blood Night" by Chet Williamson and "Chocolate" by Mick Garris.

Somtow Sucharitkul's independent monster movie *The Laughing Dead*—"a neo-expressionist horror film"—has almost completed principal photography. The shoe-string-budget feature stars L.J. Coven, Krista Keim, Promika Eaton and author Tim Sullivan as a tormented priest. *Laughing Dead* also boasts a cast of "celebrity dead" zombies that includes Ed Bryant, William F. Wu, Dennis Etchison, Stephen R. Donaldson and David Hartwell. Sucharitkul explains that, "I call it a neo-expressionist film because it combines the cynical, primary color aesthetics of exploitation films of the 1980's with a kind of new age sensitivity."

But, like, is it scary or what?



NO LAUGHING —



And on the "But what genre is it in, really?" front, *Beauty And The Beast* is getting an elaborate graphic story treatment due in May from First Publishing. Written and drawn by Wendy Pini (of *Elfquest* fame), it's to be titled *Portrait Of Love* and this all-new story is described as a cross between *Phantom Of The Opera* and *Portrait Of Jenny*. Although Wendy has been primarily known for her renderings of elves which one either finds fascinating or too cute to be tolerated, she's also capable of more serious work, as evidenced by her recent art book featuring paintings and drawings based on Michael Moorcock's Elric. The book will be squarebound, full color, 56 pages, 8 1/2 X 11 and retail for \$5.95. One wag remarked that the series itself should be called *Beauty And The Beast: A Tale Of Eternal Foreplay*.

Stephen King—what, you thought we'd get all the way through the news section without once mentioning Stephen King in this, our Stephen King special?—is rumored to have received a 40-million dollar contract for his next four novels. The terms of the contract are that no one discloses the actual figures. Almost ready to deliver is King's latest, *The Dark Half*, in which a writer's pseudonym begins to take on a life of its own.

Spotted at LAX hanging around baggage claim on 29 November, 1988: Stephen King and *Tales From The Dark Side* producer Richard Rubinstein. No word on their luggage, however.

Troma, Inc., has signed a deal with Animator Southern Star Productions, a Taft Hardic Company, to create a cartoon version of the Toxic Avenger character for a TV series. Troma recently finished filming *The Toxic Avenger, Part II*.

The Stephen King Companion, scheduled for publication this fall, draws from 15 years of King in the media as a best-selling author, writer, personality, spokesman, and director.

The book is a tribute to the man who has been described by author Douglas E. Winter as "America's storyteller" for the 80s. An entertaining look at the dark world of Stephen King, this overview is edited and written by George and Mary Beaum, at a length of 400 pages. *The Stephen King Companion* is being published by Andrews and McMeel in a trade paper edition, measuring 6X9 inches and retailing between \$12.95 to \$14.95.

Organized in five sections, the book is jam-packed with new and reprinted fiction and nonfiction, cartoons and photographs.

Part One (72 pages) tells the story behind each of King's 26 books, each book-by-book look brings together background information, sales figures, publishing trivia, anecdotes, key reviews (pro and con), and information on tie-in products like records, video tapes and audio

tapes plus ordering information. Illustrated with photographs of key editions and both original and reprinted cartoons, this section will also feature newly commissioned artwork by noted fantasy artist Tim Kirk.

Part Two, titled *The Dark World of Stephen King* (180 pages), comprises the bulk of the book and features original fiction and non-fiction about King by name-brand writers and newcomers to the field, illustrated with photographs and cartoons. Supplemented with anecdotal sidebars (articles, King trivia, and personal profiles of people important in King's career), this section is packed with informative pieces that look at King as a person, personality, and writer.

Part Three (King on King, 72 pages) provides King's observations on his life and his work drawn from interviews and personality profiles that appeared in newspapers and magazines and on TV and radio programs.

In addition, if King consents, this section would also reprint little known non-fiction by him that deserves a wider



NEWS

audience. George Beahm reports that some progress has been made in securing permissions for pieces such as "The Politics of Limited Editions," "On the Shining and Other Perpetrations," and "Ever Eat Raw Meat?"

Part Four (A King Checklist, 18 pages) provides a current checklist to King's books, movies, records, audio tapes, video tapes, and other little-known material.

Part Five (Had Enough Yet?, 18 pages) will be a current checklist of books about King with recommendations on what to buy, what not to buy, and why.

George reports that the book is nearly complete and there are plans in the works for a limited slipcased edition of 1200 from Starbur Publishing, with a cover painting by Kelly Freas.

Watch these pages for more details.



COW FROM HELL DEAD AND WELL

Last issue we reported a film in the works titled ZARDA, COW FROM HELL (since retitled, completed and on its way to video). What we didn't report is that Allen Koszowski had done a special drawing of said cow which vanished in the then cluttered office nook of co-editor Jessie Horsting, along with both photocopies of same, which she apparently kept together. "I think my dog ate it," she was reported to have said, "or maybe Steve Boyett did." But happily, Jessie's sister, Amy, flew in from England to clean her office and found the missing illo. Upon hearing the good news, Allen Koszowski removed the black mourning band he'd been wearing. The illo which ran in its place was drawn by Jessie herself. And now, for the first time anywhere, the *real* cow from Hell!



GLUED TO THE TUBE We Never Talk Anymore

House hygiene was not the Kalwien's strong suit. The postman had gotten used to the interesting aromas that would waft through the mail slot of their San Francisco area home; ten-day-old ham sandwiches, fermenting garbage, cheese from hell. But this smell was something special. Something was wrong. He called the cops.

What the police found was this: Robert and Tomiko Kalwien sitting in the living room, staring at their flickering television set—she on the sofa, he on the easy chair—she alive, he not.

"She stayed with him a week like that," said Union City policeman Thomas Shelton. "He had a blanket pulled up to his chin, watching TV."

Even in San Francisco this kind of behavior is considered unacceptable, so the cops dragged Tomiko and her decomposing husband from the TV—he to the waiting blade of the coroner, she to a hospital for psychiatric assessment.

The autopsy showed Robert had died of natural causes.

TIMOTHY LEARY TO HAVE HEAD FROZEN

From the "Tune In, Turn On and Drop Dead" file...

Timothy Leary, the slightly less crazy half of the whacky "Liddy and Leary" comedy team, has made arrangements with the California-based Alcor Life Extension Foundation to have his head removed after death and frozen for possible thawing in the distant future.

Leary's partner, noted philosopher/burglar G. Gordon Liddy, reportedly has volunteered to help with the head removal process but has publicly denounced Leary as a coward for Leary's insistence that he be dead before any work begins.



ANNOID

Kenneth Lamar Noid had *had it*. It was tough enough being ridiculed every night in those damned Domino's Pizza commercials, but when he became convinced that Domino's and Detroit Tigers owner Tom S. Monaghan had been coming into his apartment and "looking around," Noid knew it was time for action.

Noid grabbed his gun, walked down to the local Domino's Pizza and held two employees hostage for more than five hours before they escaped and he surrendered.

"Apparently Mr. Noid was having an ongoing feud in his mind with Monaghan about the 'Noid' ads," said Atlanta Police Sgt. Mark Bender. "I guess he thinks they're aimed at him."

When police arrived, Noid fired four warning shots into the ceiling. "He said he didn't want to kill us, but if we came in he would start shooting," Capt. Dave M. Perkins said.

Noid demanded \$100,000, a getaway car, and the science fiction book *THE WIDOW'S SON* by Robert Anton Wilson (a tongue-in-cheek book about great conspiracies throughout history).

He also ordered and ate a large pizza.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

Iraqi chemical warfare, Central American torture of children, United States' disregard of homeless families—I thought I had been numbed to the front page atrocities-of-the-week.

Nope.

A story in Britain's "Sunday Telegraph" let my stomach know it can still be turned.

It seems that a London hospital has been doing some ghoulish work in the Near East.

Humana Wellington Hospital, a private facility catering to London's upper-crust, has been tricking and threatening Turkish peasants into selling their kidneys for \$3500.00 per organ, the paper reported.

The hospital apparently needed some good working-class kidneys for the paying customers back home. Too many blue-bloods on dialysis, I guess.

In the latest report, the Telegraph said Turkish police arrested a bogus army colonel thought to be the local ringleader of the scheme.

Humana Wellington, though denying any wrong-doing, has promised to review its organ acquisition procedures and to cooperate with Turkish and English investigators.

My suggestion:

The people responsible for this body-rip should be forced to sell their hearts to any one with five dollars and postage. Not a bad deal considering they've never been used.

THE BIRDS

News item: "Israeli forces send explosive-laden collies and doberman pinchers into combat zones."

In direct retaliation for Israel's using dogs as walking grenades, Mother Nature has sent a squad of devil-crows to a Tel-Aviv suburb.

For more than a month, residents of Yahud, a small bedroom community six miles east of Tel-Aviv, have been menaced by a flock of crazed ravens.

About twenty of the large black birds had perched on nearby trees and were harassing residents (Yahudians?), Israel Radio reported.

Two people suffered scratches and bites in the attacks before police launched an all-out assault on the most aggressive bird's roost, fatally wounding the winged outlaw.

"This raven was evil. It had frightening black eyes, large wings and a large beak," said Yahudian Pazit Sasson.

Eliezer Frankenberg, a bird expert from Israel's Nature Reserve Authority, said he did not expect the birds to return.

"Ravens are very smart," Frankenberg said. "If one of them is killed, the others will quickly learn not to attack."

A police spokesman said the neighborhood has been quiet since the shooting.

But who knows? Maybe they're just regrouping...



THE FASHION LINE

England.

The tony country that launched safety pins through the cheek and nipple/scrotum piercing has absolutely outdone itself this time. I mean it, babe, this is gonna put the world of couture on its perforated earlobe.

Think chic.

Think human fetus earrings.

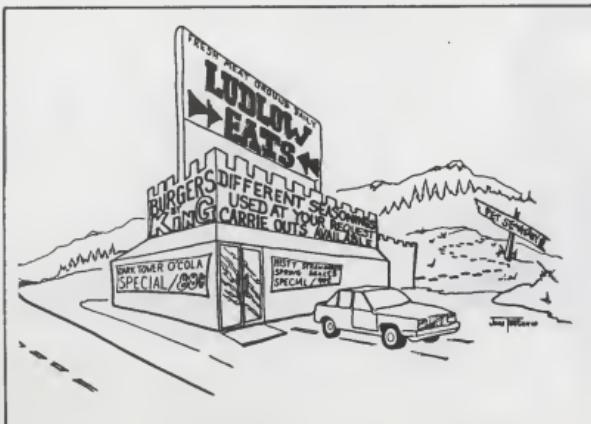
London Criminal Court, an institution known for its lack of fashion sense (just look at those wigs) recently fined an "artist" for displaying her creation at a local gallery. For some reason, the jurors found the two freeze-dried fetuses dangling from the ears of a female mannequin to be a violation of public decency.

Well, you know how reactionary some people can be. I mean, where's their sense of adventure? If it were up to them we'd still be wearing bell-bottoms (ugh) and Earth Shoes (can you imagine?).

Demand your right to beauty.

FROZEN FETUS EARRINGS—a catchy name and an inexhaustible supply.

Ciao,



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S P E C I A L S E C T I O N



STEPHEN KING lives in Bangor, Maine. He is the author of *Carrie*, *Christine*, *The Dead Zone*, *Firestarter*, *Misery*, and *The Shining*, among other novels and short stories.





IT WAS HALF PAST FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON BY THE TIME John and Elise Graham finally found their way into the little town of Willow, Maine. It was less than five miles from the Hempstead Place, but they took two wrong turns on the way. When they finally arrived on Main Street, both of them were hot and out of sorts. The Ford's air conditioner had packed it in on the trip from St. Louis, and it felt about a hundred and ten outside. Of course, it wasn't anything at all like that, John Graham thought. As the old-timers said, it wasn't the heat, it was the humidity. It felt as if you could twist your hands in the air and wring water out of it. The sky overhead was a cloudless, faded blue, but that high humidity made it feel as if it was going to rain any minute. Fuck that—it felt as if it was raining already.

"There's the market Milly Cousins told us about," Elise said, and pointed.

John grunted. "Doesn't exactly look like the supermarket of the future."

"No," Elise said carefully. They were both being careful. They had been married almost two years and they still loved each other, but it had been a long trip across country from St. Louis, especially in a car with no air conditioner and no FM radio. John had every hope they would enjoy the summer here in Willow (they ought to, with the University of Missouri picking up the tab), but he thought it might take as long as a week for them to settle in and settle down...and when the weather was yellow-dog hot like this, an argument could spin itself out of thin air. Neither of them wanted that kind of start to their summer.

John drove slowly down Main Street toward the Willow General Mercantile and Hardware. There was a rusty sign with a blue eagle on it hanging from one corner of the porch, and he

understood this was also the postal substation. The Willow Mercantile looked sleepy in the afternoon light, with one single car, a Volvo, parked beside the sign advertising ITALIAN SANDWICHES PIZZA GROCERIES FISHING LICENSES, but compared to the rest of the town, it seemed to be fairly bursting with life. There was a neon beer sign fizzing away in the window, although it would not be dark for almost three hours yet. Pretty radical, John thought. *Sure hope the owner cleared that sign with the Board of Selectmen before he put it in.*

"I thought Maine turned into Vacationland in the summer," Elise murmured.

"I think that's mostly along the seacoast," John said, turning in. "The tourists sure missed Willow, anyway."

They got out of the car and walked up the porch steps. An elderly man in a straw hat sat in a rocking chair, looking at them from shrewd little blue eyes. He was fiddling a home-made cigarette together and dribbling little bits of tobacco on the dog which lay crashed out at his feet. It was a big yellow dog of no



S T E P H E N K I N G

particular make or model. Its paws lay directly beneath one of the rocker's curved runners. The old man took no notice of the dog, seemed not even to realize it was there, but the runner stopped a quarter of an inch from the vulnerable paws each time the old man rocked forward. Elise found this unaccountably fascinating.

"Howdy, folks," the old man said.

"Hello," Elise answered.

"Hi," John said. "I'm—"

"Mr. Graham," the old man finished placidly. "Mr. and Missus Graham. Ones that took the Hempstead Place for the summer. Heard you was writin' some kind of book."

"On the in-migration of the French during the seventeenth century," John agreed. "Word sure gets around, doesn't it?"

"It does travel," the old party agreed. "Small town, you know." He stuck the cigarette in his mouth, where it promptly fell apart, sprinkling tobacco all over his legs and the dog's limp hide. The dog didn't stir. "Aw, doody," the old man said, and peeled the uncoiling paper from his lower lip. "Wife doesn't want me to smoke nummornin' anyway. She says she read it's given her cancer as well as m'ownself."

"We came into town to get a few supplies," Elise said.

"It's a wonderful place, but the cupboard is bare."

"Ayuh," the old man said. "Name's Henry Eden." He held out one bunched hand. John shook with him, and Elise followed suit. They both did so with care, and the old man nodded as if to say he appreciated it. "I expected you half an hour ago. Must have taken a wrong turn or two, I guess. Got a lot of roads for such a small town, you know." He laughed. It was a hollow, bronchial sound that turned into a phlegmy smoker's cough. "Got a power of roads in Willow, oh, ayuh!" And laughed some more.

John was frowning a little. "You were... expecting us?"

"Lucy Duet called, and said she saw the new folks go by," Eden told them. He took out his pouch of Top tobacco and opened it. He reached inside and fished out a packet of rolling papers. "You don't know Lucy, but she says you know her grandniece, Missus."

"Milly's great aunt?" Elise asked. "Milly Cousins' great aunt?"

"Ayuh," Eden agreed. He began to sprinkle tobacco.

Some of it landed on the cigarette paper, but most went onto the dog below. As John Graham began to wonder if perhaps the dog was dead, it lifted its tail and farted. So much for *that* idea, John thought. "In Willow, just about everybody's related to everybody else. Lucy lives down at the foot of the hill. I was gonna call you m'self, but since she said you was comin' in anyway..."

"How did you know we'd be coming here?" John asked.

Henry Eden shrugged, as if to say Where else is there to go?

"Did you want to talk to us?" Elise asked.

"Well, I kinda have to," Eden said. He sealed his cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. John waited to see if it would fall

apart. He felt mildly disoriented by all this, as if he had walked unknowingly into some rustic spy network.

The cigarette somehow held together. Eden produced a wooden match from one of his shirt pockets. There was a charred scrap of sandpaper tacked to one of the arms of the rocker. Eden struck the match on it and applied the flame to his cigarette, half of which incinerated on contact with the flame.

"I think you and your Missus might want to spend the night out of town," Eden finally said.

John blinked at him, bewildered. "Out of town? But...we just got here."

"Good idea, though, mister," a voice said from behind Eden.

The Grahams looked up and saw a tall woman with slumped shoulders standing inside the Mercantile's rusty screen door. Her face looked out at them from just above an old tin sign advertising Chesterfield cigarettes—Twenty-One Great Tobaccos Make Twenty Wonderful Smokes. She opened the door and came out on the porch. Her face looked sallow and tired but not stupid. She had a loaf of bread in one hand and a six-pack of Dawson's Ale in the other.

"I'm Laura Stanton," she said. "It's very nice to meet you. We don't like to seem unsociable in Willow, but it's the rainy season here tonight."

John and Elise exchanged bewildered glances. Elise looked at the sky. Except for a few small fair-weather clouds, it was a lucid, unblemished blue.

"I know how it looks," the Stanton woman said, "but that doesn't mean anything, does it, Henry?"

" Nope," Eden said. He took one giant drag on his eroded cigarette and then pitched over the porch rail.

"You can feel the humidity in the air," the Stanton woman said. "That's the key, isn't it, Henry?"

"Well," Eden allowed, "ayuh. But it is seven years. To the day."

"To the day," Laura Stanton agreed.

They both looked expectantly at the Grahams.

"Pardon me," Elise said at last. "I don't understand any of this. Is it a joke?"

This time Henry Eden and Laura Stanton exchanged a glance. They sighed at exactly the same moment, as if on cue.

"I hate this," Laura Stanton said, although whether to the old man or to herself John Graham had no idea.

"Got to be done," Eden replied.

She nodded, then sighed. It was the sign of a woman who has set down a heavy burden and knows she must now pick it up again.

"This doesn't come up very often," she said, "because the rainy season only comes in Willow every seven years—"

"June 17th," Eden put in. "Rainy season every seven years on June 17th. It's only one night, but rainy season's what it's always been called. Damned if I know why. Do you know why, Laura?"

"No," she said, "and I wish you'd stop interrupting, Henry."

I think you're getting senile."

"Well, pardon me all the way to hell and back," the old man said, clearly nettled.

Elise threw John a glance that was a little frightened. Are these people having us on? it asked. *Or are they both crazy?*

John didn't know. But he wished heartily they had just found a clam-stand beside the road and gone into Augusta for supplies in the morning.

"Now, listen," the Stanton woman said kindly. "We reserved a room for you at the Castle Motel out on Route 130, if you want it. The place was full, but the manager's my cousin, and he was able to clear one room out for me. You could come back tomorrow and spend the rest of the summer with us. We'd be glad to have you."

"If this is a joke, I'm not getting the point," John said.

"No, it's not a joke," she said. "Every seven years, it rains toads here in Willow."

"Toads," Elise said in a distant, musing, I-am-dreaming-all-this voice.

"Toads!" Henry Eden affirmed cheerfully.

John was looking cautiously around for help, if help should be needed. But Main Street was utterly deserted. Not only that, he saw, but shuttered. Not a car moved on the road. Not a single pedestrian was visible on either sidewalk.

We could be in trouble here, he thought, and for the first time he was afraid as well as bewildered.

"Now, I'm just doing my duty," Laura Stanton said.

"Henry, too. You see, it doesn't just *sprinkle* toads. It pours...It can be frightening if you're not prepared for it. In fact, it can be dangerous."

"Come on," John said to Elise, taking her arm above the elbow. "It was nice to meet both of you people," he added. He guided his wife down the porch steps, wondering if his nose was growing yet. He kept looking back at the old man and the slump-shouldered, pallid woman standing beside him. It didn't seem like a good idea to turn his back on them completely. Not at all like a good idea.

The woman took a step toward them, and John almost stumbled and fell off the last step.

"It is a little hard to believe," she agreed. "You probably think I am just as nutty as a fruitcake."

"Not at all," John said. A large, insincere smile surfaced on his face and froze there. Dear Jesus, why had he ever left St. Louis? He had driven nearly fifteen hundred miles with a busted air conditioner to meet Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde.

"That's fine," she said with a weird serenity that made him stop by the ITALIAN SANDWICHES sign, still six feet from the Ford. "Even people who have heard of rains of frogs and toads and birds and such don't have a very clear idea of what happens in Willow every seven years on the 17th of June. If you are going to stay, I'd stay in the house. You'll most likely be all right in the house."

"Might want to close y'shutters, though," Eden said, and


 "He kept looking back at the old man and the slump-shouldered pallid woman standing beside him. It didn't seem like a good idea to turn his back on them completely. Not at all like a good idea."


 the dog lifted his tail and articulated another long and groaning dog-fart.

"We'll...we'll do that," Elise said faintly, and then John had the Ford's passenger door open and was nearly shovelling her inside.

"You bet," he said through his large frozen grin.

"And come back and see us tomorrow," Eden called as John hurried around the front of the Ford to his side. "You'll feel a mite safer around us tomorrow, I think."

John waved, got behind the wheel, and pulled out.

There was silence on the porch for a moment as the old man and the woman with the pallid, unhealthy skin watched the Ford head back up Main Street, at a considerably higher speed than that at which it had come.

"Well, we done it," the old man said contentedly.

"Yes," she agreed, "and I feel like a horse's ass. I always feel like a horse's ass."

"Well," he said, "it's only once every seven years. And it's the ritual."

As if agreeing it was so, the dog flipped up his tail and farted.

"I know it's the ritual," she said crossly, and booted the dog. "That is the *stinkiest* mutt in four towns, Henry Eden!"

The dog arose with a grunt and staggered down the porch stairs, pausing only long enough to favor Laura Stanton with a reproachful gaze.

"He can't help it," Eden said.

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She sighed, looking up the road after the Ford. "It's too bad," she said. "They seem like such *nice* people."

"Nor can we help that," Henry Eden said, and began to roll another smoke.

That was why the Grahams ended up eating dinner at a clam-stand after all. They found one in the neighboring town of Woolwich and sat at a picnic table in a little clearing beside it to eat. The clam-stand was in sharp, almost jarring contrast to Willow's Main Street. The parking lot was nearly full (most of the cars, like theirs, had out-of-state license plates), and yelling kids with ice cream on their faces chased after one another while their parents strolled about, slapped blackflies, and waited for their orders to come up. The stand had a fairly wide menu. In fact, John thought, you could have just about anything you wanted, as long as it wasn't too big to fit in a deep-fat fryer.

"I don't know if I can spend two days in that town, let alone two months," Elise said. "The bloom is off the rose for this mother's daughter, Johnny."

"It was a joke," John said. "Just the kind of thing the natives like to play on the tourists. They just went too far with it. They're probably kicking themselves for that right now."

"They looked serious," she said. "How am I supposed to go back there and fact that old man after that?"

"He probably won't even remember we were there," John said. "He looked like he might need a roadmap to find his way to the bathroom, to tell you the truth."

"Well, where was everybody?"

"Bear supper at the Grange or the Eastern Star, probably," John said, stretching. He peeked into her clam basket. "You didn't eat much, love."

"Love wasn't very hungry."

"I tell you it was just a joke," he said, taking her hand and speaking earnestly. "They carried it further than they meant to, that's all."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yes," he said. "I mean, every seven years it rains toads in Willow, Maine?"

She smiled wanly. "It doesn't rain," she said, "it pours."

"Yeah, that's what she said, isn't it? Well, I don't believe it, and I don't think you do, either. When I was a kid at sleep-away camp, it used to be snipe hunts. This really isn't much different. And when you stop to think about it, it really isn't that surprising."

"What isn't?"

"That people who make most of their yearly income dealing with summer people should develop a summer camp mentality."

"That woman... sort of scared me."

John Graham's normally pleasant face grew stern and hard. The expression did not look at home on his face, but neither did it look faked or insincere.

"I know," he said, picking up their wrappings and napkins and plastic baskets. "And there's going to be an apology made for that. I find foolishness for the sake of foolishness agreeable enough, but when someone scares my wife—hell, they scared me a little, too—I draw the line. Ready to go back?"

"Can you find it again?"

He grinned, and immediately looked more like himself. "I left a trail of breadcrumbs."

"How wise you are," she said, and got up. She was smiling again, and John was glad to see it. She drew a deep breath and let it out. "The humidity seems to have dropped."

"Yeah." John deposited their waste into a trash basket with a left-handed hook shot. He winked at her. "So much for rainy season."

But by the time they turned onto the Hempstead Road, the humidity had returned, and with a vengeance. John felt as if his tee-shirt had turned into a clammy mass of cobweb clinging to his chest and back. The sky, now turning a delicate shade of evening violet, was still perfectly clear, but he felt that, if he'd had a straw, he could have drunk directly from the air.

There was only one other house on the road, at the foot of the long hill with the Hempstead Place at the top. As they drove past it, John saw the silhouette of a woman standing motionless at one of the windows and looking out at them.

"Well, there's your friend Milly's great aunt," John said. "She was a great sport to call the local crazies down at the general store and tell them we were coming. I wonder if they would have dragged out the whoopee cushions and the joy-buzzers if we'd stayed a little longer."

"That dog had his own built-in joy-buzzer."

John laughed and nodded.

Five minutes later they were turning into their own driveway. It was badly overgrown with weeds and dwarf bushes, and John intended to take care of *that* little situation before the summer got much older. The Hempstead Place itself was a rambling country farmhouse, added to by succeeding generations whenever the urge—or the need—to do some building happened to strike. A barn stood behind it, connected to the house by three rambling, zig-zag sheds. In this flush of early summer, two of the three sheds were almost buried by fragrant drifts of honeysuckle.

It commanded a gorgeous view of the town, especially on a clear night like this one. John wondered briefly just how it could be so clear when the humidity was so high, and dismissed the thought.

Elise joined him in front of the car and they stood there for a moment, arms around each others' waists, looking at the hills which rolled gently off in the direction of Augusta, losing themselves in the shadows of evening.

"It's beautiful," she murmured.

"And listen," he said.

There was a marshy area of reeds and high grass fifty yards or so behind the barn, and in it a chorus of frogs sang and thumped and and snapped the elastics God had for some reason stretched in their throats.

"Well," she said, "the frogs are all present and accounted for, anyway."

"No toads, though." He looked up at the clear sky, in which Venus had opened her coldly burning eye. "There they are, Elise! Up there! Clouds of toads!"

She giggled.

"Tonight in the small town of Willow," he intoned, "'a cold front of toads met a warm front of newts, and the result was—'"

She elbowed him. "You," she said. "Let's go in."

They went in. And they did not pass Go. And they did not collect two hundred dollars.

They went directly to bed.

Elise was startled out of a satisfying drowse about an hour later by a thump on the roof. She got up on her elbows. "What was that, Johnny?"

"Huzz," John said, and turned over on his side.

Toads, she thought, and giggled...but it was a nervous giggle. She got up and went to the window, and before she looked for anything which might have fallen on the ground, she found herself looking up at the sky.

It was still cloudless, and now shot with a trillion spangled stars. She looked at them, for a moment hypnotized by their simple silent beauty.

Thud.

She jerked back from the window and looked up at the ceiling. Whatever it was, it had hit the roof just overhead.

"John! Johnny! Wake up!"

"Huh? What?" He sat up, his hair all tangled tufts and clocksprings.

"It's started," she said, and giggled shrilly. "The rain of frogs."

"Toads," he corrected. "Ellie, what are you talking ab—"

Thud-thud.

He looked around, then swung his feet out of bed.

"This is ridiculous," he said softly and angrily.

"What do you m—?"

Thud-CRASH! There was a tinkle of glass downstairs.

"Oh, goddam," he said, getting up and yanking on his bluejeans. "Enough. This is just...fucking...enough."

Several soft thuds hit the side of the house and the roof.

She cringed against him, frightened now. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that crazy woman and probably the old man and some of their friends ar out theré throwing things at the house," he said. "and I am going to put a stop to it right now. Maybe they've held onto the custom of shivareeing the new folks in this

little town, but—"

THUD! SMASH! From the kitchen.

"God-DAMN!" John yelled, and ran out into the hall.

"Don't leave me!" Elise cried, and ran after him.

He flicked up the hallway light switch before plunging downstairs. Soft thumps and thuds struck the house in an increasing rhythm, and Elise had time to think, *How many people from town are out there? How many does it take to do that? And what are they throwing? Rocks wrapped in pillow cases?*

John reached the foot of the stairs and went into the living room. There was a large window in there which gave on the same view of the long, descending hills which they had admired earlier. The window was broken. Shards and splinters of glass lay all over the rug. He started toward the window, meaning to yell something at them about how he was going to get his shotgun. Then he looked at the broken glass again, remembered that his feet were bare, and stopped. For a moment he didn't know what to do. Then he saw a dark shape lying in the broken glass—the rock one of the imbecilic, interbred bastards had used to break the window, he assumed—and saw red. He might have charged to the window anyway, bare feet or no bare feet, but just then the rock twitched and moved.

Why, it's not a rock at all, he thought. It's a...

"John?" Elise asked. The house rang with those soft thuds now. It was if they were being bombarded with large, rotten-soft hailstones. "John, what is it?"

"It's a toad," he said stupidly. He was still looking at the dark, twitching shape in the litter of broken glass, and spoke more to himself than to his wife.

He raised his eyes and looked out the window. What he saw out there struck him mute with horror and incredulity. He could no longer see the hills or the horizon—hell, he could barely see the barn, and that was less than forty feet away.

The air was stuffed with falling shapes.

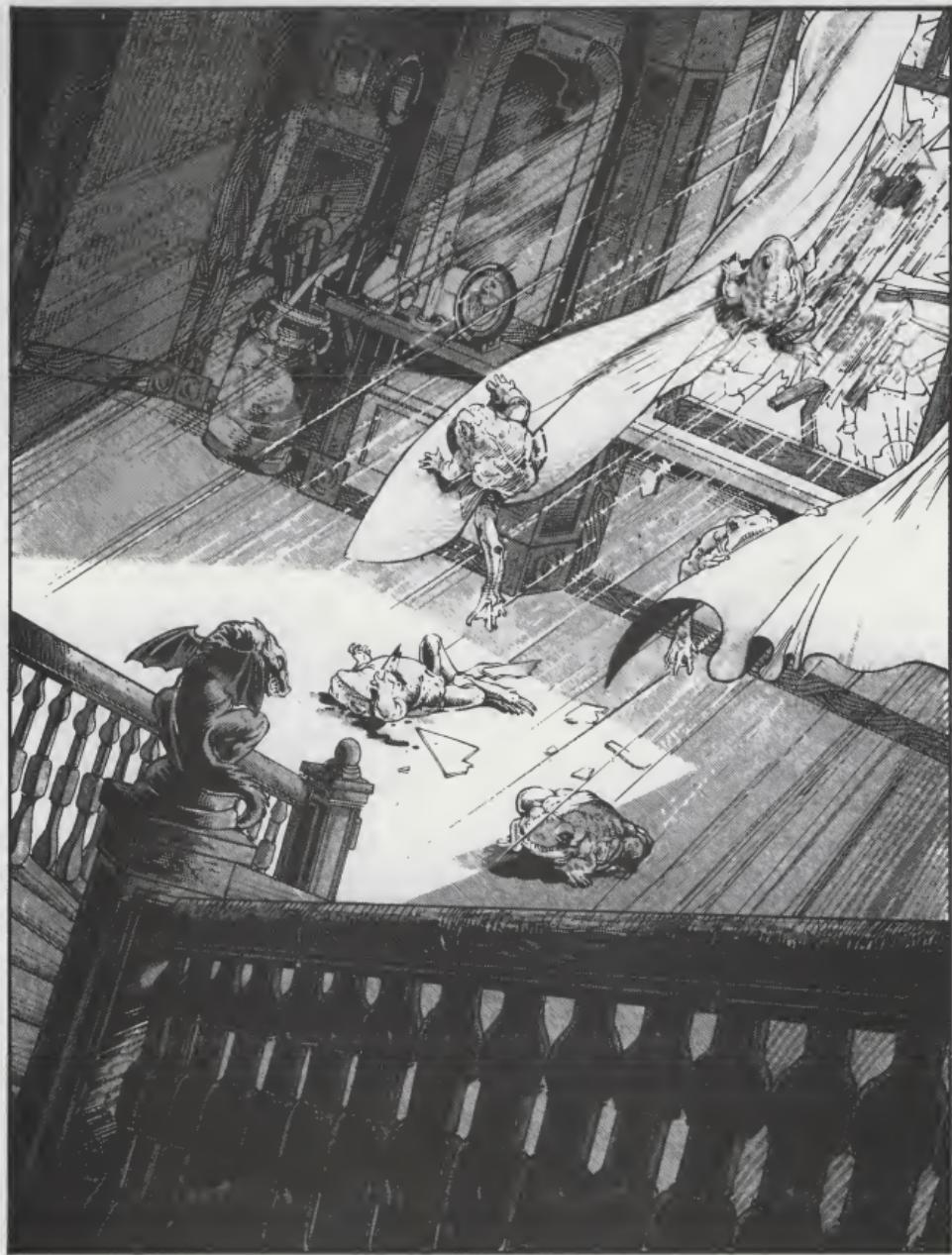
Three more of them came in through the broken window. One landed on the floor, not far from its twitching mate. It landed on a sharp sliver of glass and black fluid burst from its body in thick ropes.

Elise screamed.

The other two caught in the curtains, which began to twist and jerk as if in a fitful breeze. One of them managed to disentangle itself. It struck the floor and then hopped toward John.

He groped at the wall with a hand which felt as if it were no part of him at all. His fingers stumbled across the light switch and flipped it up.

The thing hopping across the glass-littered floor toward him was a toad, but it was also not a toad. Its green-black body was too large, too lumpy. Its black and gold eyes bulged and lolled like freakish eggs. And bursting from its mouth, unhinging the jaw, was a bouquet of large, needle-sharp teeth.



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It made a thick croaking noise and bounded at John as if on springs. Behind it, more toads were falling in through the window. The ones which struck the floor were either crippled or died outright, but many others—too many others—caught in the curtains and tumbled to the floor unharmed.

"Get out of here!" John yelled to his wife, and kicked at the toad which—it was insane, but it was true—was attacking him. It did not flinch back from his foot, but sank that mouthful of crooked needles first over and then into his toes. The pain was immediate, fiery, and immense. Without thinking, he made a half-turn and kicked the wall as hard as he could. He felt his toes break, but the toad broke, as well, splattering its black blood onto the wainscoting in a half-circle, like a fan. His toes had become a crazy road-sign, pointing in all directions at once.

Elise was standing frozen in the hall doorway. She could hear windowglass shattering all over the house. She had put on one of John's tee-shirts after they had finished making love, and now she was clutching the neck of it with both hands. The air was full of ugly croaking sounds.

"Get out!" John screamed. He turned, shaking his bloody foot. The toad which had sunk the grapping-hook of its mouth into it was dead, but its huge and improbable teeth were still buried deep in him. This time he kicked at the air, like a man punting a football, and the toad finally flew free.

The faded living room carpet was now covered with bloated, hopping bodies. And they were all hopping at them.

John ran to the doorway. His foot came down on one of the toads and burst it open. His heel skidded in the cold jelly which popped out of its body and he almost fell. Elise relinquished her death-grip on the neck of her tee-shirt and grabbed him. They stumbled into the hall, and John slammed the door, catching one of the toads in the act of hopping through. The door hacked it in half. The top half twitched and juddered on the floor, its toothy, black-lipped mouth opening and closing, its black-and-golden pop-eyes goggling at them.

Elise clapped her hands to the sides of her face and began to wail hysterically. John reached out to her. She shook her head and cringed away from him, her hair falling over her face.

The sound of the toads hitting the roof was bad, but the croakings and chirrupings were worse, because these latter sounds were coming from inside the house... and *all over* the house. He thought of the old man sitting on the porch of the Willow Mercantile in his rocker, calling after them: *Might want to close y' shutters.*

Christ, why didn't I believe him?

And, on the heels of that: *How was I supposed to believe him? Nothing in my whole life prepared me to believe him!*

And, below the sound of toads thudding onto the ground outside and toads squashing themselves to guts and goo on the roof, he heard a more ominous sound: the chewing, splintering sound of toads in the living room starting to bite their way through the door. He could actually see it settling more firmly against its hinges as more and more toads crowded their weight against it.

He turned around and saw toads hopping down the main staircase by the dozens.

"Elise!" He grabbed at her. She kept shrieking and pulling away from him. A sleeve of the tee-shirt tore free. He looked at the ragged chunk of cloth in his hand with perfect stupidity for a moment and then let it drop.

"Elise!"

She shrieked and drew back again.

Now the first toads had reached the hall floor and were hopping eagerly toward them. There was a brittle tinkle of glass as the fanlight over the door shattered. A toad whizzed through it, struck the carpet, and lay on its back, mottled pink belly exposed, webbed feet twitching in the air.

He grabbed his wife, shook her. "We have to go down cellar! We'll be safer in the cellar!"

"No!" Elise screamed at him. Her eyes were giant floating zeros, and he understood she was not refusing his idea of retreating to the cellar but refusing everything.

There was no time for gentle measures or soothing words. He bunched the front of the shirt she was wearing in his fist and yanked her down the hall like a cop dragging a recalcitrant prisoner to a squad-car. One of the toads which had been in the vanguard of those hopping and tumbling down the stairs leaped gigantically and snicked its mouth of damning-needles shut around a chunk of space occupied by Elise's bare heel a second before.

Halfway down the hall, she got the idea and began to come with him or her own accord. They reached the door. John turned the knob and yanked it, but the door wouldn't move.

"Goddam!" he cried, and yanked it again. No good. Nothing.

"John, hurry!"

She looked back over her shoulder and saw toads flooding down the hall toward them, leaping crazily as if on springs, landing on each other, striking the walls with their faded rambler-rose wallpaper, landing on their backs and being overrun by their mates. They were all teeth and gold-black eyes and heaving, leathery bodies.

"JOHN, PLEASE! PL—"

Then one of them leaped and battenied on her left thigh just above the knee. Elise screamed and seized it, her fingers punching through its skin and into its dark liquid workings. She tore it free and for a moment, as she raised her arms, the thing was right in front of her eyes, its teeth gnashing like a piece of... some small but homicidal factory machine. She threw it as hard as she could. It cartwheeled in the air and then splattered against the wall just opposite the kitchen door. It did not fall but stuck fast in the glue of its own guts.

"JOHN! OH JESUS, JOHN!"

John Graham suddenly realized what he was doing wrong. He reversed the direction of his effort, pushing on the door instead of pulling it. It flew open, almost spilling him forward and down the stairs, and he wondered briefly if his mother had had any kids that lived. He flailed at the railing, caught hold of



it, and then Elise almost knocked him down again, bolting past him and down the stairs, screaming like a fireball in the night.

Oh she's going to fall, she's going to break her neck—

But, somehow, she did not. She reached the cellar's earth floor and collapsed in a sobbing heap, clutching at her torn thigh.

Toads were leaping and hopping in through the open cellar doorway.

John caught his balance, turned, and slapped the door shut. Several of the toads caught on their side of the door leaped right off the landing, struck the stairs, and fell through the spaces between the risers. Another took an almost vertical leap straight up, and John was suddenly shaken by wild laughter—a sudden bright image of a toad on a pogo-stick had come to him. Still laughing, he balled his right hand into a fist and punched the toad dead center in its pulsing, flabby chest at the top of its leap, while it hung in perfect equilibrium between gravity and its own expended energy. It zoomed off into the shadows, and John heard a soft *bonk!* as it struck the furnace.

He scrawled at the wall in the dark, and his fingers found the raised cylinder which was the old-fashioned toggle light-switch. He flipped it, and that was when Elise began to scream again. A toad had gotten tangled in her hair. It croaked and twisted and turned and bit at her neck, rolling itself into something which resembled a large, misshapen curler.

Elise lurched to her feet and ran in a large circle, miraculously avoiding a tumble over the boxes which had been stacked and stored down here. She struck one of the cellar's support posts, rebounded, then turned and banged the back of her head twice, briskly, against it. There was a thick squishing sound and the toad's curl unrolled. It hung there for a moment and then fell out of her hair, tumbling down the back of her t-shirt, leaving dribbles of ichor.

She screamed, nearly mad with fear and pain and revulsion. John half-ran, half-stumbled down the cellar stairs and enfolded her in his arms. She fought against him at first and then surrendered. Her screams gradually dissolved into steady weeping.

Then, over the soft thunder of the toads striking the house and the grounds, they heard the croaking of the toads which had fallen down here.

She drew away from him, her eyes shifting wildly from side to side.

"Where are they?" she panted. Her voice was hoarse, almost a bark, from all the screaming she had done. "Where are they, John?"

But they didn't have to look; the toads had already seen them, and came hopping eagerly toward them.

The Grahams retreated, and John saw a rusty shovel leaning against the wall. He grabbed it and beat the toads to death with it as they came. Only one got past him. It leaped from the floor to a box and from the box it jumped at Elise, catching the cloth of her shirt in its teeth and dangling there between her breasts, legs kicking.

"Stand still!" John barked at her. He dropped the shovel, took two steps forward, grabbed the toad, and hauled it off her shirt. It took a chunk of cloth with it. The cotton strip hung from one of its fangs as it twisted and pulsed and wriggled in John's hands. Its hide was warty, dry but horribly warm and somehow busy. He snapped his hands into fists, popping the toad. Blood and slime squirted out from between his fingers.

Less than a dozen of the little monsters had actually made it through the cellar door, and soon they were all dead. John and Elise stood together, arms around each others' waists, listening to the steady rain of toads outside.

John looked over at the low cellar windows. They were packed and dark, and he suddenly saw the house as it must look from the outside, buried in a drift of squirming, lunging, leaping toads.

"We've got to block the windows, he said hoarsely. "Their weight is going to break them, and if that happens, they'll pour in."

"With what?" Elise asked in her hoarse bark of a voice. "With what?"

He looked around and saw several sheets of plywood, elderly and dark, leaning against one wall. Not much, perhaps, but something.

"That," he said. "Help me to break it up into smaller pieces."

They worked quickly and frantically. There were only four windows in the cellar, and their very narrowness probably caused the panes to hold longer than the larger windows upstairs would have done. They were just finishing the last when the heard the glass of the first shatter behind the plywood...but the plywood held.

They staggered into the middle of the cellar again, John limping on his broken foot.

From the top of the stairway came the sound of the toads eating their way through the cellar door.

"What do we do if they eat all the way through it?" Elise whispered.

"I don't know," he said...and that was when the door of the coal-chute, which had not been used for years but which was still intact, suddenly swung open under the weight of all the toads which had fallen or hopped into it, and thousands of them poured out in a high-pressure jet.

Elise could not scream; she had damaged her vocal chords too badly for that.

It did not last long for the Grahams in the cellar after the coal-chute gave way, but until it was over, John Graham screamed quite adequately for both of them.

By midnight, the downpour of toads in Willow had slackened off to a mild, croaking drizzle.

At one-thirty in the morning, the last toad fell out of the dark, starry sky, landed in a pine tree near the lake, hopped to the ground, and disappeared into the night. It was over for another seven years.

Around quarter past five, the first light began to creep into the sky and over the land. Willow was buried beneath a writhing, hopping, complaining carpet of toads. The buildings on Main Street had lost their angles and corners, everything was rounded and hunched and twitching. The sign on Route 9 which read **WELCOME TO WILLOW, MAINE, THE FRIENDLY PLACE!** looked as if someone had put about thirty shotgun shells through it. The holes, of course, had been made by flying toads. The sign in front of the General Mercantile which advertised **ITALIAN SANDWICHES PIZZA GROCERIES FISHING LICENSES** had been knocked over. Toads played leapfrog on and around it. There was a small toad convention going on atop each of the gas-pumps at Sonny's Sunoco. Two toads sat upon the slowly swinging iron arm of the weather-vane atop the Willow Hardware Store like small misshapen children on a merry-go-round.

At the lake, the few floats which had been put out this early (only the hardiest swimmers dared the waters of Lake Willow before July 4th, toads or no toads) were piled high with toads, and the fish were going crazy with so much food almost within reach. Every now and then there was a *plip plip!* sound as one or two of the toads jostling for place on the floats were knocked off and some hungry trout or salmon's breakfast was served.

The roads in and out of town—there were a lot of them for such

a small town, as Henry Eden had said—were paved with toads. The power was out for the nonce; fast-falling toads had broken the power-lines in any number of places. Most of the gardens were ruined, but Willow wasn't much of a farming community, anyway. Several people kept fairly large dairy herds, but they had all been safely tucked away for the night. Dairy farmers in Willow knew all about rainy season and had no wish to lose their milkers to the hordes of leaping, carnivorous toads. What in the hell would you tell the insurance company?

As the light brightened over the Hempstead Place, it revealed drifts of dead toads on the roof, rain-gutters which had been splintered loose by dive-bombing toads, a dooryard that was alive with toads. They hopped in and out of the barn, they stuffed the chimneys, they hopped nonchalantly about John Graham's Ford and sat in croaking rows on the front seat like a church congregation waiting for the services to start. Heaps of toads, mostly dead, lay in drifts against the building. Some of these drifts were six feet deep.

At 6:05, the sun cleared the horizon, and as its rays struck them, the toads began to melt.

Their skins bleached, turned white, then appeared to become transparent. Soon a smoky vapor which gave off a vaguely swampy smell began to trail up from the bodies and little bubbly rivulets of moisture began to course down them. Their eyes fell in or fell out, depending on their positions when the sun hit them. Their skins popped with an audible sound, and for perhaps ten minutes it sounded as if champagne corks were popping all over Willow.

They decomposed rapidly after that, melting into puddles of cloudy white *shmeq* that looked like human semen. This liquid ran down the pitches of the Hempstead Places's roof in little creeks and dripped from the eaves like pus.

The living toads died; the dead ones simply rotted to white liquid which bubbled and then sank slowly into the ground. The earth sent up tiny ribands of steam, and for a little while every field in Willow looked like the site of a dying volcano.

By quarter of seven it was over, except for the repairs, and the residents were used to them.

It seemed a small price to pay for another seven years of quiet prosperity in this mostly forgotten Maine backwater.

At five minutes past eight, Laura Stanton's old Volvo turned into the dooryard of the General Mercantile. When Laura got out, she looked paler and sicker than ever. She was sick, in fact; she still had the six-pack of Dawson's Ale in one hand, but now all the bottles were empty. She had a vicious hang-over.

Henry Eden came out on the porch. His dog walked behind him.

"Get that mutt inside, or I'm gonna turn right around and go home," Laura said from the foot of the stairs.

"He can't help passing gas, Laura."

"That doesn't mean I have to be around when he lets rip," Laura said. "I mean it, now, Henry. My head hurts like a

S T E P H E N N K I N G

bastard, and the last thing I need this morning is listening to that dog play *Hail Columbia* out of its asshole."

"Go inside, Toby," Henry said, holding the door open.

Toby looked up at him with wet eyes, as if to say *Do I have to? Things were just getting interesting out here.*

"Go on, now," Henry said.

Tony walked back inside, and Henry shut the door. Laura waited until she heard the latch snick firmly shut, and then she mounted the steps.

"Your sign fell over," she said, handing him the carton of empties.

"I got eyes, woman," Henry said. He was not in the best temper this morning, himself. Few people in Willow would be. Sleeping through a rain of toads was a goddamn hard piece of work. Thank God it only came once every seven years, or a man would be apt to go shit out of his mind.

"You should have taken it in," she said.

Henry muttered something she didn't quite catch.

"What was that?"

"I said we should have tried harder," Henry said defiantly. "They was a nice young couple. We should have tried harder."

She felt a touch of compassion for the old man in spite of her thudding head, and laid a hand on his arm. "It's the ritual," she said.

"Well, sometimes I just feel like saying frig the ritual!"

"Henry!" She drew her hand back, shocked in spite of herself. But he wasn't getting any younger, she reminded herself. The wheels were getting a little rusty upstairs, no doubt.

"I don't care," he said stubbornly. "They seemed like a real nice young couple. You said so, too, and don't try to say you didn't."

"I did think they were nice," she said. "But we can't help that, Henry. Why, you said so yourself just last night."

"I know," he sighed.

"We don't make them stay," she said. "Just the opposite. We warn them out of town. They decide to stay themselves. They always decide to stay. They make their own decisions. That's part of the ritual, too."

"I know," he repeated. He drew a deep breath and grimaced. "I hate the smell...afterwards. Smells a little like clabbered milk."

"It'll be gone by noon. You know that."

"Ayuh. But I just about hope I'm underground when it comes around again, Laura. And if I ain't, I hope somebody

else gets the job of meetin' whoever comes just before the rainy season. I like bein' able to pay m'bills when they come due just as well as anybody else, but I tell you, a man gets tired of toads. Even if it is only once every seven years, a man can get damned tired of toads."

"A woman, too," she said softly.

"Well," he said with a sigh. "I guess it's time to start cleanin' up for the summer, ain't it?"

"I guess it is," she said. "And, you know, Henry, we don't make ritual, we only follow it. And things could change. There's no telling when or why, but they could. This might be the last time we have rainy season. Or next time no one from out of town might come—"

"Don't say that," he said fearfully. "If no one comes, the toads might not go away like they do when the sun hits 'em."

"There, you see?" she asked. "You have come around to my side of it, after all."

"Well," he said, "it's a long time. Ain't it. Seven years is a long time."

"Yes."

"They was a nice young couple, weren't they?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Nasty way to go," Henry Eden said with a slight hitch in his voice, and this time she said nothing. After a moment, Henry asked her if she would help him set his sign up again. In spite of her nasty headache, Laura said she would—she didn't like to see Henry so low, especially when he was feeling low over something he could control no more than he could control the tides, or the phases of the moon.

By the time they finished, he seemed to feel a little better.

"Ayuh," he said. "Seven years is a *hell* of a long time."

It is, she thought, but it always passes, and rainy season always comes around again, and the outsiders always come with it, always two of them, and we always tell them exactly what is going to happen, and they don't believe it, and what happens...happens.

"Come on, you old crock," she said, "offer me a cup of coffee before my head splits wide open."

He offered her a cup, and before they had finished, the sounds of hammers and saws had begun in town. Outside the window they could look down Main Street and see people folding back their shutters, talking and laughing.

The air was warm and dry, the sky overhead was a pale and flawless blue, and in Willow, rainy season was over.



THE YEAR OF THE GREEN-EYED TOADS

There's not been
A year like
It before
Or since, everywhere
You looked the
Toads danced.
They came from the
Trees of circumstance.
They bent their knees
And winked —
A display that upset
The windows of cars
On old roads
That curved
In the fate that
Was final in
Its own destiny.

BY JOEY FROEHLICH

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and
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STEPHEN KING

1989

THE YEAR

IN

PREVIEW

By
Tyson
Blue

This article is Tyson Blue's first appearance in *Midnight Graffiti*. Tyson is a long time King academician and his work has appeared EVERYWHERE. Tyson will be available to his public this coming May in Estes Park, Colorado at the Overlook...uh...Stanley Hotel for the Horrorfest convention which we plugged last issue. Make plans now to beleaguer him with questions, touch the hand that has actually touched the hand you know who, call his room very late at night and, most important, buy him drinks.

A lot of times, when people find out that I'm a horror critic, and that I specialize in Stephen King, they first question I get is a variation on a theme, being, "What's he got in store for us next year?"

(The questions used to be, "What is *The Dark Tower* and how can I get a copy?", but NAL finally took care of that one for me last September.)

So, as a sort of general answer to those of you who have either asked me this question, or who haven't had the opportunity and would just like to know, I'll take the rest of this space to give you a sneak peek at just what Stephen King has planned for the next year or so.

Actually, even though 1989 is well into King's oft-ballyhooed layoff from publishing, he does have several projects either just out or due throughout the year in various media.

The first of these should already be out by the time you read this. At the time this was being written (two days before Thanksgiving), King was supposed to be finishing up a seasonal essay for the January 1989 issue of *Castle Rock: The Stephen King Newsletter*. Although the newsletter was to have ceased publication in December, it was decided at the last minute to continue under the editorship of former managing editor Christopher Spruce (brother of founder Stephanie Leonard) and with your humble correspondent continuing as Contributing Editor. (Write P.O. Box 8183, Bangor, ME 04401 for further information. Enclose \$20 for a one-year subscription.)

The early issues of *Castle Rock* featured the serialized appearance of King's "Dolan's Cadillac," a bizarre automotive update of the Edgar Allan Poe classic, "The Cask of Amontillado." In December 1988 or January 1989, a radically-revised edition of the story is slated to be published in a limited edition (long sold out) from Lord John Press (19073 Los Alimos St., Northridge, CA 91326). The book is to be illustrated by Clive Barker.

Lord John Press also publishes a limited-edition signed poster of King's essay, "Letters from Hell," originally published in a couple of places as, "Ever Eat Raw Meat?"

January 1989 is going to be a busy—and expensive—time for must-have King collectors, with several extravagant items hitting the market at about the same time. About the cheapest is King's new short story "The Rainy Season," which you should have already read, since it appears in the magazine you are holding in your hands.

The rarest Stephen King item of all also makes its bow in January, as the Whitney Museum of Art releases the 250-copy limited edition of King's *My Pretty Pony*, illustrated by Barbara

Kreuger and priced at \$2,200 per signed and numbered copy. Bound in leather, with covers of polished stainless steel and featuring a functional digital watch inset in the front, the book measures a gigantic 13 1/2 by 21 inches and weighs a hefty 13 pounds!

The book is not a horror story, but an unusually gently tale dealing with differing perceptions of time. There is a slim possibility that the book will appear in a trade edition from Alfred A. Knopf sometime in the future, but that is uncertain right now.

Also due in January is the audiocassette version of *The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three*, read, as was the previous *Dark Tower* tape released last spring, by King himself and distributed by New Audio Library, NAL's audio division. The unabridged reading was done at the studios of WZON, King's Bangor radio station.

The program is recorded on eight cassettes, and runs around 12 hours; about twice the length of *The Gunslinger*. However, the tapes will retail for only \$34.95, about five or six dollars more than the \$29.95 pricetag for *The Gunslinger*.

The package will feature a new cover by Phil Hale, who also did the illustrations for the Donald M. Grant limited edition hardcover of the novel, which appeared in 1987.

The book will follow the audio adaption in a Plum trade paperback edition set to appear in March, also featuring a new Hale cover and the same artwork which graced the limited. This should come as good news to King collectors who have been trying to read the *Dark Tower* series since its existence became general knowledge when the book was listed among the author's works in *Pet Semetary*.

In May, King's new short story, "Home Delivery," will appear in the deluxe limited edition of *Book of the Dead*, an anthology of George Romero-styled "living dead" zombie tales edited by Splattermeisters-General, John Skipp and Craig Spector. The book is supposed to be bound in genuine simulated human skins, complete with warts, scars and other distinguishing marks, and will be available from Mark Ziesing (P.O. Box 806, Willimantic, CT 06226). At this writing, there is no information available as yet about the price or size of the edition, but the story is a good one, and there are other fine writers in the volume as well (Joe Lansdale, David Schow and many more) and it is certain to be a landmark.

For those who might not be able to afford the limited edition, Bantam Books will be releasing a trade edition of *Book of the Dead* in July. And for those who simply cannot wait, I refer you to both the special preview of the book in this very magazine last issue, or to my *The Unseen King*, which may actually have been published by the time you read this!

July will also mark the last of King's projects for 1989, the Laurel-Paramount film of King's novel, *Pet Semetary*. The film

was shot entirely on location in Maine, and is directed by Mary Lambert from a first-rate screenplay by King. The cast is impressive as well, featuring Dale Midkiff ("Dallas: The Early Years") as Louis Creed, the man whose efforts to set the world right for his family lead him down the blackest of paths; Denise Crosby ("Star Trek: The Next Generation") plays his wife, Rachel; veteran actor Fred Gwynne ("The Munsters") appears as Jud Crandall, the Creeds' neighbor, an elderly Mainer with a taste for Springsteen; and newcomer Miko Hughes makes an impressive debut as Gage Creed, the kid who, in the words of Christopher Spruce, takes a licking and keeps on ticking.

King himself makes a cameo appearance in the film as well, but we won't tell you where; there have to be a few surprises left for you. We will say, however, that some of the people who hung around the set a lot during production feel that the film has a good shot at being one of the best horror films ever made.

This concludes our agenda of Stephen King's output for 1989, so far as we know. Of course, there could be a few additions to the list, as King is always at work (his layoff was from publishing, not writing!). However, there are a few more tidbits of information about projects in the long-range forecast.

Due out in 1990 from Doubleday is *The Unexpurgated Stand*, a new edition of King's apocalyptic novel restoring about 400 pages of material originally trimmed from the novel at the publisher's request. The book will also feature illustrations by Berni Wrightson, with whom King has also worked on several occasions, including the comicbook version of *Creepshow*, the Wrightson editions of *Frankenstein* and *Cycle of the Werewolf*.

In the earliest stages of development at this time is the film version of *Misery*. About all that is known about this project is that Rob Reiner is slated to direct, which should be encouraging to King fans as he also helmed "Stand By Me," by far the best King film to date.

As to future writing projects, not much is known. King has finished a new novel, *The Dark Half*, described as a variation on the Frankenstein theme, although he has no plans to publish it as yet. Rumor hath it well that he is working on the next volume in the ongoing *Dark Tower* saga, but there is nothing concrete on that front, either. And then there was a short story, originally intended for *Castle Rock*, which became a novel called *The Sundogs...*

But for now, all there is these is idle speculation and rumor. The only way to be sure is to hang in there and watch it all unfold. In the meantime, as you can see, there should be plenty of new Stephen King material available to keep you busy while you wait.

(Can you imagine what it might have been like if this had been a year when he wasn't taking a layoff from publishing?!)

**MY
PrettyPony**

**BARBARA
KRUGER
STEPHEN
KING**

F

OR THOSE OF YOU WHO FIND THEMSELVES A FEW DOLLARS SHY OF the \$2200.00 it costs to pick up one of the 100 copies of this very special Stephen King book from the Whitney Museum Artists and Writers series, we can at least show you a peek. The press kit says it best:

My Pretty Pony is the sixth book in the Artists and Writers Series of fine press books published by the Library Fellows of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Barbara Kruger has contributed artwork to accompany a previously unpublished short story by Stephen King. The edition is two hundred and fifty, plus thirty artists' copies, signed by the artist and the author.

The book was designed by Barbara Kruger and produced by May Castleberry, Artists and Writers Series Editor at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Nine lithographs have been proofed and printed on Rives paper by Maurice Sánchez and James Miller at Derrière L'Étoile Studios in New York. The text has been set by hand and printed by letterpress in twenty-four point Century Schoolbook at A. Colish in Mount Vernon, New York, under the super-

vision of Jerry Kelly. Sixteen pages, including the title and colophon in Helvetica Bold, have been printed by silkscreen by Pinwheel in New York. The book has been bound in leather, cloth, and metal at BookLab in Austin, Texas, under the supervision of Craig Jensen. The stainless steel cover, inset with a Big Time digital timepiece, has been manufactured by Herman Hirsch at Hi-Tech Stainless Steel Specialties in Dallas, Texas. Each book measures 13½ by 21 inches.

BARBARA KRUGER lives in New York City. Her work has been shown widely at museums and exhibition spaces including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Documenta*, Kassel, West Germany; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Venice Biennale, Italy.



*"Real real time
is your pony. Your
pretty pony. Say it:
'My pretty pony.' "*



As you may have guessed from the cover the story concerns time—from the perspective of elderly George Banning as he shares his thoughts with his grandson Clive. The story is an intimate look at relativity: George understands time to be a malleable thing, controllable and uncontrollable, stretching to infinity for a moment before compressing and passing in the wink of an eye. He tries to pass this sense of time on to his grandson in the following passage:

"He thought Grandpa would say something soft and soothing and meaningless then, something like, Sure, sure. You don't need to say; I was a boy once myself, you know. But this was Grandpa and Grandpa *never* said things like that, which he knew, but, like those drifting summer evening calls to come in for supper, was also a constant surprise. 'All that changes,' Grandpa said with the dry finality of a judge pronouncing a harsh sentence for a capital crime. 'When you get to a certain age—right around fourteen, I think, mostly when the two halves of the human race go on and make the mistake of discovering each other—time starts to be real time. The *real* real time. It ain't long like it was or short like it gets to be. It does, you know. But for most of your life it's mostly the *real* real time. You know what that is, Clivey?'"
"No, sir."
"Then take instruction: *real* real time is your pony. Your pretty pony. Say it: 'My pretty pony.'***"

My Pretty Pony is a quiet, introspective work by King; an uncustomary gentleness in tone and events reveal the depth and maturity of his writing. The reflective mind we often only glimpse in other works is here in abundance.

Though there are no current plans to collect this story in a more affordable format, it's a story we hope will eventually be shared with all of King's fans.



THE UNWRITTEN KING

By
Steve
Spignesi

Did you know that in some dark corner of the Stephen Kingdom there is a crepuscular zone where the Lost and Unwritten Stories live? The Lost Stories have disappeared over the years, much like little David Brown did during his brother Hilly's magic show in *The Tommyknockers*. They include King's first short story (something to do with dinosaurs who were allergic to leather) and another one about an asteroid miner and a pink cube. The Lost Stories also include the two tales, "The Dimension Warp," and "I'm Falling" from the 1963 Stephen King/Chris Chesley collaborative collection "People, Places, and Things."

These stories are gone forever, and we can only mourn their loss.

The Unwritten Stories, however, are another...er story altogether.

The Unwritten King consists of those stories that Stephen King has thought of—and actually described in interviews—but hasn't yet taken the time to write down.

Here is a look at four notable tales that have been crawling around up in that attic where King hides his goblins. The sources were interviews with King—one talk with Douglas Winter, one with Julie Washington, and one with Bryan Miller. Only one of the four stories is titled: "The Rats Are Loose on Flight 74," although for the Miller story, King made up his own dustjacket blurb.

"The Rats Are Loose on Flight 74" is King's version of *The Fear of Flying*:

"I worry about airplanes. I can remember being on a transcontinental flight and getting to the halfway point—which the stewardesses always announce with great cheer—although what they are saying is that you are now too far to turn back. You either have to go ahead or die. And I thought, what if somebody said, 'I need a pillow,' and the stewardess opened the overhead rack and all these rats came out into her face, and she started to scream, and the rats were biting off her nose and everything else, and one of the people in first class opened up a pouch to get an airsick bag because this was so gross, and the rats came out of there, rats came out of everywhere. And the name of this story was going to be 'The Rats Are Loose on Flight

74.' I just haven't gotten around to writing it yet, but I probably will."

—*Faces of Fear*, pg. 239

David Letterman notwithstanding, Stephen King also has his own Top Ten list, made up of his Top Ten Fears—which he calls "Bears." "The Rats Are Loose on Flight 74" once again shows King working with is Number 5 "Bear," the fear of rats. King has used rats as a horror device in the past, most notably in the *Night Shift* story "Graveyard Shift" in which our friend Hall becomes a late supper for mutant rats in the sub-sub basement of the Gates Falls mill:

"Something had happened to the rats back here, some hideous mutation that never could have survived under the eye of the sun; nature would have forbidden it. But down here, nature had taken on another ghastly face.

"The rats were gigantic, some as high as three feet. But their rear legs were gone and they were blind as moles, like their flying cousins."

— "Graveyard Shift" *Night Shift*

Another notable use of rats by King was in a segment from *Salem's Lot* that never appeared in print. Doubleday vetoed the scene and King was forced to censor himself. King described the "lost scene" in an interview with *Playboy* magazine:

"I had a scene in which Jimmy Cody, the local doctor, is devoured in a boardinghouse basement by a horde of rats summoned from the town dump by the leader of the vampires. They swarm all over him like a writhing, furry carpet, biting and clawing, and when he tries to scream a warning to his companion upstairs, one of them scurries into his open mouth and squirms there as it gnaws out his tongue. I loved the scene, but my editor made it clear that no way would Doubleday publish something like that, and I came around eventually and impaled poor Jimmy on knives. But shit, it just wasn't the same."

— *Playboy*, June, 1983

There's no doubt that "The Rats Are Loose on Flight 74" would be a terrific story in King's hands. The only question is, of course, how would it end?

An excerpt from the section "In A Region With No Proper Name" from the forthcoming book *The Shape Under the Sheet: The Complete Stephen King Encyclopedia* by Stephen J. Spignesi (Perian Press, 1989) ©1989 Stephen J. Spignesi

In an interview with Julie Washington called "If You're Scared Silly, Then Stephen King is Happy," which originally appeared in the Cleveland, Ohio *Plain Dealer* on January 31, 1988, and which was reprinted in the April, 1988 *Castle Rock*, King described two story ideas that he hadn't gotten around to writing down yet. He didn't mention titles, so I will just describe them by their subject matter: The "Kiddie Ride" Story, and The "Airport Ladies Room" Story.

The "Kiddie Ride" Story

"You know those kiddie rides in malls? Well, what would happen if a mother put her kid inside a ride, dropped in a quarter and watched the thing spin around a few times, and when it stopped, she discovered her son had disappeared?"

—From "If You're Scared Silly, Then Stephen King is Happy" by Julie Washington

Where'd the kid go? To Altair-5 with the Lost Stories and David Brown? This is an eerie idea that has a real "Twilight Zone" feel to it. King uses this motif in the following story as well (also from the Washington article):

The "Airport Ladies Room" Story

"Or how about this: Husband and wife are at the airport to board a plane. The woman has to go to the ladies' room, so the man waits outside for her. And waits. She never comes out. Pretty soon he notices that other women are going in, but not coming out. Boyfriends and husbands accumulate outside the bathroom, all feeling uneasy but reluctant to talk to each other. Eventually they alert airport security, then the governor and ultimately the president in an effort to deal with the mystery."

This sounds like a fun idea, most notably because here King is toying with the idea of setting another story in a bathroom. King's most memorable uses of bathrooms occur in *IT* (the exploding toilets), and in "Sneakers," from *Night Visions* 5 (the haunted toilet stall).

Interestingly, with this unwritten story, King turns a public ladies' rest room into something opening onto another dimension.

There appear to be a lot of doorways that open onto Altair-5.

On Wednesday, October 26, 1988, the *New York Times* ran an interview with King by Bryan Miller called "Writer Eats Steak Before It Eats Him" as part of their "Eating Out With..." column.

King had dinner with Miller and King's business manager, Arthur Greene. King, drinking a Bloody Mary, split the house-steak special with Greene, with fried potatoes and creamed spinach on the side.

King talked about the different uses of food in his work, mentioning specifically *Thinner*, as well as *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Cujo*, and *Pet Semetary*. King also discussed his own culinary interests, and said he often cooked for his children. He described one of his specialties: "[G]round chuck with canned spaghetti, jazzed up with cayenne and other peppers." He admitted "It's awful stuff, but they gobble it up."

After the meal was over, Miller and King chatted about King being "forever on the lookout for ghoulish new plots. Miller revealed that "[King] even devised one on the spot when I mentioned that I had once worked for a newspaper in Connecticut."

Let's call this one...

The "Werewolves in Connecticut" Story

"I can see it now. You go up there and take this job because, well, either your wife died or you had some terrible debilitating illness. That's when the werewolves show up. You know it, but nobody else will believe you and your editor won't publish any of these things."

"It was a quiet little New England town, until he came."

From "Writer Eats Steak Before It Eats Him" by

Bryan Miller

New York Times, October 26, 1988

King's most notable use of werewolves, of course, is in *Cycle of the Werewolf*, and in that book, there's only one werewolf terrorizing the town. I think it would be terrific to have a whole swarm (flock?) (pack?) of lycanthropes wreaking havoc on "a quiet little New England town."

The unwritten tales lurking in the dark corners of his imagination just re-emphasize the sheer storytelling powers possessed by Stephen King. I once read that the music of Beethoven that survived on paper was only ten percent of what he actually wrote. I've seen accounts that told of the composer playing original music in public for hours on end... and never writing any of it down.

For now, we can only imagine the countless untold stories hidden somewhere behind those glasses, but what is really more important is that we revel in the tales told.

Stephen Spignesi is the author of the forthcoming book The Shape Under the Sheet: The Complete Stephen King Encyclopedia, to be published in either late 1989 or early 1990 by Pierian Press. The Shape Under the Sheet will contain the first worldwide book appearance of Stephen King's "Before the Play," the five-part prologue to *The Shining* not included in the original novel. *Spignesi is also the author of the 1987 Pierian Press release Mayberry, My Hometown, an Andy Griffith Show encyclopedia.*

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NIGHT SHIFT — Doubleday, GC, (1978), [1], 12,000 cc, dw price — \$9.95. Probably the most difficult Doubleday to locate. VF — \$750.00

THE STAND — Doubleday, GC, (1978), [1], 70,000 cc, \$12.95. (Signed) VG-F — \$750.00; (Unsigned) M — \$350.00

THE DEAD ZONE — Viking, NY, (1979), [1], 50,000 cc, B/16/79 & \$11.95. VF — \$100.00

THE DEAD ZONE — MacDonald, L, (1979). VF — \$150.00

THE LONG WALK — Signet, NY, (1979), [3], we also states "First printing, July 1979"; written by Richard Bachman; # J 7545. VF-NM — \$100.00

THE LONG WALK — Signet Paperback, (NY). Third Printing. PM — \$10.00

FIRESTARTER — Phantasia Hunt Wds, (1980), [2], 725 sgd off, issued in dw & slipcase, sgd and dated on 4 days. 5th, 6th, 7th & 8th of July. M — \$750.00

FIRESTARTER — Phantasia Hunt Wds, (1980), [2], 26 sgd ff. inc. issued w/o dw or slipcase, all dated July 8, 1980, bound in asbestos. \$3500.00

FIRESTARTER — Viking, NY (1980), [1], 100,000 cc. NM — \$75.00

FIRESTARTER — 1st British Ed., MacDonald L, (1980), [1], 10,000 cc. VF — \$150.00

THE TOWER — Gallery Meg, NY (1980), wr included in Nov. issue. NM-M — \$75.00

ROADWORK — New American Lib, NY (1981), [3], wr. Signet paperback; also states "First Printing, March 1981", # E 9665. F — \$100.00

ROADWORK — New English Lib, L (1983), [1], wr. M — \$35.00

DANSE MACABRE — Everett, NY (1981), [2], 15 sgd. Ir cc issued w/o dw in slipcase. VF-NM — \$3,000.00

DANSE MACABRE — Everett, NY (1981), [2], 250 sgd. no cc issued in glasses, dw in slipcase. M — \$850.00

STEPHEN KING — Hämemann/Octopus, NY (1981), [1], incl. front four books. NM — \$100.00

CUJO — Mysterious Press, NY (1981), [2], 750 sgd, no cc issued in slipcase. M — \$275.00

CUJO — Viking, NY (1981), [1], 150,000 cc. VF — \$100.00

CUJO — (1st British), MacDonald, L, (1982), [1]. VF — \$100.00

THE JAUNT — Gallery Meg, NY (1981), wr included in December issue. NM-M — \$75.00

CREEPSHOW — NAL, NY (1982), [3], wr based on movie script. "First printing, July 1982". M — \$25.00

DIFFERENT SEASONS — Viking, NY (1982), [1], 200,000 cc. M — \$100.00

DIFFERENT SEASONS — (1st British), McDonald & Co., L, (1982), [1]. VF — \$150.00

THE DARK TOWER: THE GUNSLINGER — Donald Grant-W. Kingston, (1982), [2], sgd ff cc issued in dw & slipcase. VF-NM — \$300.00

THE DARK TOWER: THE GUNSLINGER — Donald Grant-W. Kingston, (1982), [2], 500 sgd no cc, issued in dw and slipcase. M — \$150.00

THE DARK TOWER: THE GUNSLINGER — Donald Grant-W. Kingston, (1982), [2], set (books 1-4) in slipcase. M — \$500.00

THE DARK TOWER: THE GUNSLINGER — Donald Grant-W. Kingston, (1982), [1], 10,000 cc. Note: the list ed price also. M — \$750.00

THE DARK TOWER: THE GUNSLINGER — Donald Grant-W. Kingston, (1984), 10,000 cc second printing indicated; dw does not list ed. M — \$450.00

DARK TOWER II — THE DRAWING OF THE THREE — The long awaited sequel to THE GUNSLINGER, the 2nd novel in the Dark Tower series by Donald Grant, in a edition of 30,000 copies. It is no more than twice the word length of the Gunslinger and features ten full color illustrations, along with black and white interiors. This book will be much sought after in years to come. M — \$85.00

THE RUNNING MAN — Signet, NY (1982), [3], wr also states "First printing, May 1982"; written by Richard Bachman. #AE 1508. VF — \$150.00

WHISPERS — Stuart Schif Birmingham, (1982), [2], 26 sgd ff cc, King issue of Whispers Mag bound in cloth — no dw. M — \$500.00

WHISPERS — Stuart Schif Birmingham, (1982), [2], 350 sgd. no cc, no dw. M — \$275.00

FEAR ITSELF — Underwood-Miller, SF/Columbia, PA 1982, [2], special edition of (6) leatherbound egd, no cc (signed by King and all contributors including Romero) — scarcest leatherbound King book to date! This one's going to drive the completists nuts! M — \$1750.00

THE RAFT — Galaxy Mag, NY (1982), wr incl in Nov. issue. NM — \$75.00

CHRISTINE — Donald Grant-W. Kingston (1983), [2], 1000 sgd, no cc issued in dw & slipcase. M — \$275.00

CHRISTINE — Viking, NY (1983), [1], 270,000 cc. VF — \$35.00

CHRISTINE — 1st British Ed., Hodder & Stoughton, L, (1983), [1], 12,000 cc. VF — \$85.00

PET SEMETARY — Doubleday, GC, (1983), [1], wr. Uncorrected Galleys' corrections throughout and not typeset. Reportedly only a very small number of copies were released. NM — \$250.00

PET SEMETARY — Doubleday, GC, (1983), [1], 250,000 cc. M — \$75.00

PET SEMETARY — Hodder & Stoughton, L, (1983), [1], 15,000 cc. NM — \$100.00

FRANKENSTEIN — Dodd, Mead, NY, (1983), [2], 500 sgd, no cc issued in slipcase. King intro and sgd by him. Still in box. M — \$400.00

CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF — Enchantment (Westland 1983), [2], 350 sgd, no cc, with price lead-in; no. 101 to 350, sgd by King and in dw & slipcase. M — \$400.00

CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF — Enchantment (Westland 1983), [2], 35 sgd, no cc, portion incl 12 full color and 12 black & white illus. Also incl 1500 word essay by King on Wightson. Sg by King & Wightson. NM — \$800.00

CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF — Enchantment (Westland 1983), 7,500 cc. M — \$150.00

GRAND ILLUSIONS — Image, Pittsburg, (1983), [1], wr written by Tom Savini, intro by King. "First printing, Jan 1983". VF — \$50.00

THE PLANT, PART II — Pitturm, Pr. Bangor, (1983), [2], 200 no. cc. wr for Holiday Greening, out of series. PM — \$350.00

THINNER — New American Library, NY (1984), [3], wr. Special ADA edition. Uncorrected Advance Proof. M — \$250.00

THINNER — New American Library, NY (1984), [3], 26,000 cc as Richman. Bachman (quantity per Publ Weekly 3/22/85 although stated in book to be 10,000). PM — \$75.00

THINNER — New English Library, L (1984), 30,000 cc M — \$100.00

THE TALISMAN — Viking, 1st British, Middlesex, (1984), [1], (published 9/17/84). "Never Precedes Amer. Ed." M — \$100.00

THE TALISMAN — Viking/Putnam, NY (1984), [1], (published 11/84). M — \$50.00

THE TALISMAN — Donald Grant-W. Kingston/B, (1984), [2], 1200 sgd, no cc, 2 vols. "Special illus edition" (colored); issued w/o dw in slipcase. Also reported that each copy received 5 cc sgd by authors & the other artists — quite possibly the prettiest of the King limiteds with the exception of the first edition. M — \$325.00

THE TALISMAN — Donald Grant-W. Kingston/B, (1984), [2], 1,200 cc. 2 vols. issued w/o dw in slipcase — semi books as above only different binding and no signatures — this item is a real sleep well and will eventually command a lot of attention. Especially after Spielberg does the movie. NM — \$100.00

THE EYES OF THE DRAGON — Phlitrum Press, Bangor, (1984), [2], 250 sgd, no cc, numeraire in red, reserved for private distribution. Issued w/o dw in slipcase. New in box. PM — Inquire

THE EYES OF THE DRAGON — Phlitrum Press, Bangor, (1984), [2], 1000 sgd, no cc, numbered in black (1 through 1000); issued w/o dw in slipcase. M — \$750.00

SKELETON CREW — Putnam, NY (1985), [3], 500,000 cc. (published 6/21/85 at 18.95) quantity per Publ Weekly. M — \$75.00

SKELETON CREW — MacDonald, L (1985), [1]. NM — \$100.00

SKELETON CREW — Scream Press, Santa Cruz, (1985), [2], 1,000 sgd, no cc, in dw & slipcase, sgd by King end J. K. Potter (artist). M — \$300.00

SKELETON CREW — Scream Press, Santa Cruz, (1986), 52 sgd. No fd. cc, bound in thick black leather, skeleton embossed on face, silver printing, zipper case, paper gilded in silver — one of the most impressive King items ever done. My hat goes off to Jeff Compton on this one. PM — \$1750.00

SKELETON CREW — Scream Press, Santa Cruz, (1986). 1 of 17 presentation copies of which only eight were offered to the public
PM — Inquire

THE BACHMAN BOOK: FOUR EARLY STORIES — New American Lib. NY, (1985). [3], 350,000 cc. Also states "First Plume Pr. 1985".
M — \$100.00

KINGDOM OF FEAR — Underwood & Miller, Columbia, PA (1985). 1st Trade Edition. Compilation of articles about King
PM — \$56.00

KINGDOM OF FEAR — Underwood & Miller, Columbia, PA (1985). Limited Edition of 500 cc, sigd by the contributors, incl. Clive Barker, Helen Ellison, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, William F Nolan, Andrew Greeley, Whitley Strieber and Michael McDowell.
PM — \$190.00

IT — Published in Germany. — Limited Edition of 250 cc of which only 150 were signed by King. — A limited edition, numbered, with a leather slipcase — **VERY LAUGH** — true world wide 1st edition of **IT** preceding the American version by several months.
PM — \$450.00

IT — Viking, NY, (1986). Advanced reading copy.
M — \$400.00

IT — Viking, NY, (1986). 1st trade
M — \$50.00

ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS PRESENTS STEPHEN KING. Published by New Media Publishers Inc. (1984). Magazine format. Very nicely done fanzine with associated articles and art photos including a 5 x 7 K review, Steve Bassano illustrated story, short fiction, Egyptian graffiti, S.K. One of a kind. Out of print. Mint.
\$35.00

CHAMBERS OF HORRORS — British 1st Edition Octopus Books Ltd, London, (1984). Excellent anthology of horror by many of the great horror writers includes King short story "Night of the Agent" and 30 other stories. 1st Edition.
M — \$20.00

NOW AND ON EARTH by Jim Thompson. Dennis McMillan Publ HC, (1988). Limited Boxed Edition. 700 copies signed by author. Forward by King.
M — \$100.00

OMNI — October 1986. Feature Stephen King story. First and Only Appearance "The end of the Whole Mess" — Also interview with Clive Barker.
M — \$10.00

A FANTASY READER — A 7th World Fantasy Convention book edited by Jeff Frene and Jack Rems. Published October 30, 1981 by the 7th World Fantasy Convention. Contains Stephen King's "The Bird and the Aster" from the book "IT". — The first appearance of any material from this book and it came out five years before the book did — also included are stories by many other well-known writers, including Peter S. Beagle, Edith Wharton, Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell, Fredric Brown, Daniel F. Elkin, Peter Straub and more. — The hard-bound book with dustjacket is beautifully done with high quality paper, is one of 1,000 copies and was expressly done for the World Fantasy Convention and never sold to the public. This book is a must have item from the convention.
PM — \$75.00

NIGHT VISIONS V — Published by Dark Harvest, (1988), features three new short stories by Stephen King. Also new stories by Den Simmons and George R. R. Martin. 850 copy hardback illustrated ed. went out of print prior to publication. Getting hard to find.
M — \$35.00

NIGHT VISIONS V — Signed/limned ed. 850 copies, signed by King, Simmons and Martin
M — \$195.00

NIGHT VISIONS V — Proof copy.
RM — \$150.00

GERMAN MISERY "SIE" — 1st printing, beautifully bound in cell skin, only 50 copies were done this way, very scarce.
M — \$500.00

GERMAN MIST — "Nebel" 500 copies of this illustrated hardback were published, however the book violated copyrights and was soon destroyed. Only a handful survived
NM — Inquire

DOLAN'S CADILLAC — Bound in leather, 100 copies. This long awaited short story is due out soon from Lord John Presa. The book is sold out from the publisher, signed & numbered.
M — Inquire

STEPHEN KING GOES TO HOLLYWOOD — Written by Jeff Conner of Screenplay fame. — King's first book. — Underwood and Miller, share in the delux leatherbound (1/4) version limited to 28 copies, signed by author, publisher. Also contains signatures of film directors George Romero and Tobe Hooper and makeup artist Tom Savini
M — \$250.00

Please note: Also available without Romero, Hooper and Savini signatures for \$200.00

MISERY — 1st British, beautiful cover art. This one went out of print instantly.
NM — \$100.00

VAMPIRE — Anthology edited by Alan Ryan. This is a proof copy containing a Stephen King story that was pulled before the book was published making this a unique S.K. item. Extreme scarcity.
NM — \$1500.00

STEPHEN KING HOLOGRAPHIC — Handwritten manuscript to an unidentified publisher, short story titled "Kerning" — written on a 8 1/2" x 11" composition notebook. Also included is the outline to the movie Silver Bullet, 20 pages of King solving math equations and a personal note to his wife. This is definitely **one** of a kind item. Cell or write for details on this one.
NM — \$5,000.00

MY PRETTY PONY — A collection of Stephen's drawings and renowned commentaries. — Ballantine Krueger, (1986). — Bound with metal plates and red leather. The front cover has a digital clock on it. This is an extremely elaborate project. Wine or call for my detailed flyer on this.
M — Inquire

For those of you that only want to read **My Pretty Pony** — it is limited trade edition of this will be published in June. I am taking advance orders for this now — the price is fifty dollars and payment must accompany your order.

"LETTERS FROM HELL" — This is a 500 copy limited edition, signed and numbered 18" x 24" broadside (a print or lithograph suitable for framing). It is printed letterpress in three colors on heavy white art paper and has a deckled edge.
M — \$200.00

TOOMYKNOCKERS — 1st British, Hodder and Stoughton, (1986). Small print run went out of print instantly. Cover art much nicer than the American.
M — \$75.00

PRIME EVIL — Published by Donald M. Grant, (1988). Edited by Douglas Winter, illustrated by Thomas Carty with stories by Stephen King, Paul Hazel, Dennis Etchison, Clive Barker, Thomas Tewes, M John Hascall, Michael Moorcock, Peter Straub, Charles de Lint, Thomas Ligotti, Ramsey Campbell, Whitley Strieber and Jack Casper. Signed by all contributors. It is bound in leather with a leather hinged tray case that encloses the book. It is absolutely gorgeous, a work of art. Every decorated horror collector will have to have it. — 1000 copies bound to 1000 copies
PM, PC, British Edition. — Inquire

MASQUES II — Meday & Assoc. (1987). All new stories of horror and the supernatural. Edited by J. N. Witherington. Anthology features Poppy by Stephen King
M — \$30.00
Limited edition, slipcase, signed by Editor
M — \$45.00

BARE BONES — Underwood-Miller, Columba, PA, 1987. Compilation of articles on King. Slipcase edition, 1/1000.
M — \$150.00

REIGN OF FEAR — Underwood-Miller, Columba, PA, 1988. Compilation of articles on King. Signed/Ltd./Slip case
M — \$150.00

KINGDOM OF FEAR — Underwood-Miller, Columba, PA, 1989. Compilation of articles on King. Note: This is a limited edition, one of three copies bound in leather, signed by all contributors except King.
M — \$150.00

MIDNIGHT GRAFFITI, VOLUME #3 — February 1989 Horror Magazine featuring S.K. with a new 7000 word short story by King, an excerpt from Lyon Blue's new book **The Unseen King** and an article on British S. King books
M — \$4.95

CLIVE BARKER

BOOKS OF BLOOD VOLUMES I and II — London: Sphere Books, (1984). The first combined (8 1/2" x 11" hardcover) ed. Collects "Books of Blood Volume I" and "Books of Blood Volume II". Reproduced, one of approximately 1500 copies distributed by a small British book club in advance of the American publication. — Inquire
M — \$80.00

BOOKS OF BLOOD VOLUMES I-IV — London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, (1985-1986). 4 volumes. The definitive set! 1st hardcover and 1st separate hardcover ed. Trade issue, each volume specially signed by Barker. Min set and w.s. with art by Barker. If you haven't seen Barker's art yet — you are in for a real treat. These volumes are out of print now. If you are a fan of Barker's art, these are must have items. — Inquire
M — \$80.00

BOOKS OF BLOOD VOLUMES I-IV — London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, (1985-1986). 4 volumes. The definitive set! 1st hardcover and 1st separate hardcover ed. Trade issue, each volume specially signed by Barker. Min set and w.s. with art by Barker. If you haven't seen Barker's art yet — you are in for a real treat. These volumes are out of print now. If you are a fan of Barker's art, these are must have items. — Inquire
M — \$80.00

14 1/2" x 20" LIMITED EDITION PRINTS OF THE SIX BRITISH BOOKS OF BLOOD — Illustrated by Clive Barker. 1000 copies signed and numbered.
M — \$200.00

BOOKS OF BLOOD — Sean Cruz: Scream Press, (1985). 1st US (1st combined) ed. Collects "Books of Blood Volumes I-III". This edition incorporates some textual revisions and slight reworking, introduced by Ramsey Campbell. — Inquire
M — \$150.00

BOOKS OF BLOOD VOLUME IV — VOLUME V — N.p., The Leisure Circle, (1986). 1st combined (and possible first hardcover) of Collects "Books of Blood Volume IV" and "Books of Blood Volume V". Published for members of The Leisure Circle, a British book club, possibly possibly issued a week or so prior to release of the Weidenfeld and Nicolson hardbound ed. d.w.
M — \$80.00

THE DAMNATION GAME — London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, (1985). 1st ed. Please note this is Barker's first novel. Signed, out of print, d.w.
M — \$75.00

A SPECIAL PREVIEW TALE FROM THE INHUMAN CONDITION — To be published by the Poseidon Press in August 1988 (cover title). NV: Poseidon Press, (1988). Printed in September. — Includes a release copy of "Requiem" and a printed by the Scream Books edition, "Books of Blood Volume IV", printed separately here for the first time, with 2 page "appreciation" of Barker by Stephen King. Given away in 1986 ABA in New Orleans — King **absolutely** renews about Barker in his "appreciation". Signed, Very Scarce
M — \$150.00

THE INHUMAN CONDITION — New York, Poseidon Press, (1988). First U.S. hardcover edition of Books of Blood IV. — Inquire
\$35.00, \$45.00, \$45.00

OMNI — May 1986. Clive Barker's first American magazine appearance "Books of Blood" excerpt
M — \$10.00

WEAVEWORLD — Uncorrected proof, Simon & Schuster, (1987).
M — \$75.00

WEAVEWORLD — 1st printing, (1987). Simon & Schuster, signed
M — \$45.00

WEAVEWORLD — Advanced reading copy, paperbacks, Simon & Schuster, (1988), with printing error on cover.
M — \$35.00

WEAVEWORLD — American limited edition, 500 copies signed & numbered, slipcase.
M — \$200.00

WEAVEWORLD — British limited 1/4 bound in leather, illustrated by Clive Barker, slipcase, 500 copies s/n, slipcase
M — \$325.00

GERMAN DAMNATION GAME — Beautiful signed limited ed. 500 copies, illustrated
M — \$350.00

GERMAN BOOKS OF BLOOD VOLUME I — Gorgeous red satin finish, ltd ed., 250 copies
M — \$200.00

NIGHT VISIONS III — Dark Harvest, (1987). Features "The Hellbound Heart" which is the preface to the Hellraiser films.
M — \$75.00

NIGHT VISIONS III — Limited ed., 500 copies, signed & numbered
M — \$175.00

CABAL — Simon & Schuster, (1988). 1st printing, signed
\$35.00

BOOKS OF BLOOD 4, 5, 6 — Scream Press, (1988). Individual, signed, limited, slip case editions of 4, 5, 6. 250 copies each #4 is finished and it is beautiful. 5 & 6 are on their way and should be out very soon. Sold as sets only.
M — \$45.00

FLY IN MY EYE — Arcane Comix #2 Black & White Imperial format, perfect bound comic book featuring comics, portfolios, fiction and more. Includes some artwork by Clive Barker
M — \$15.00

Writealike Contest

What's the next best thing to the Famous Writer's Correspondence School? The Famous Writer's Writealike Contest!

Here's the deal:

1. In 1,000 words or less (about four double-spaced pages) do your best to ape your favorite famous writer. We'd rather you try to be funny...but do what your muse tells you. Make sure it's a style everyone's familiar with—or we won't be able to tell if you've done a winning take-off.
2. The winner gets 200 bucks and we print the winning entry next issue.
3. We're the judges. We can be bribed.

We're even going to give you an example. In honor of Stephen King's appearance this issue, we're pleased to present...

BIG MAC ATTACK

not by STEPHEN KING

The funny thing is that at the time I really wasn't very hungry at all. Oh, I thought I could maybe throw back a large fries and a Gigantor diet Coke, but the real reason I was lurking beneath the Bangor golden arches was Patty McGuire, the prettiest girl in school.

I could see her clearly through the windows of the place, prim and attentive behind the counter in her butterscotch-brown polyester uniform and matching nametag, October-red hair pinned and tucked up under a dopey paper cap, as I maledgered, gathering my wits.

"Redheads? Sass!" my Nubby Flo was fond of saying. "They's all twistin' in the wind!" I should add that Nubby was herself a natural redhead, and I am inclined to agree with her on the point.

This notwithstanding, I swung confidently through the double doors, my knees knocking only in my head. After all, here I was, the new kid in town, from the wrong side of the tracks, with my sights set firmly on Patty McGuire, virgin heir to the McGuire thousands, or so it was said.

Any long-time resident of Bangor could've told you she was a McGuire without a second glance. Y'see, (all) the McGuires, ever' gol'durn last one of 'em; shared a certain extraordinary physical characteristic. I wouldn't call it a family resemblance, more like a family rubber stamp.

They all had... well, it's hard to put your finger on right away, but once you realize what it is you can't miss it. It's like this, all of 'em... well, their faces... are sort of, *crooked*, y'know? Yeah, crooked... Like, bent a little this way or that. Their *whole* face. Not *unattractive*, mind you, just... *bizarre*.

None of this changed the fact that Patty McGuire was still the prettiest girl in school.

And here she was, right in front of me, flashing eyes, smooth skin, a happy smile of sparkling (beef)

teeth. Her low, lovely voice sang out, "May I take your order, please?" Please. She said please. I stood there, numb and dumb, mesmerized by her

(patties)

eyes. I couldn't move. There was just something (special)

about her. She cocked her head to one side quizzically. Better do something soon, I thought. Time to turn on the (sauce)

charm.

I opened my mouth to speak, couldn't match her bright gaze, so I shyly glanced away. What I saw, that is, what caught my eye, still gnaws at me, and I (lettuce)

pray I never see its like again.

"BIG MAC ATTACK" COPYRIGHT ©1989 BY STAN GIESEA

"Way back in the corner of the stainless-steel sideboard where the burgers pile up, under the heat lamp that burns twenty-four hours a day, every day, I noticed a lone, ignored, polystyrene container, coated in cobwebs and dust and spattered grease. It looked as if it might have been there for weeks, maybe months, and it was...quivering?"

I didn't have any time to think about it because right at that moment whatever it was that was inside that container broke clean through, pulsating and glowing, throbbing and growing at an inconceivable rate. It grew and grew; I thought it would never stop!

And as it grew, it changed. There's no explaining it, but before my eyes it mutated into a monstrous, raging behemoth! My God, it was horrible! It was as if all the dark visions of H.P. Lovecraft had sprung forth, hot off the griddle. Jes-(cheese) us Christ! It was impossible to encompass. It drooled and mewled and burbled with relish, snapped its huge and voracious jaws, licking its ground-beef lips with its gangly, green (pickles) tongue. Its fetid breath

(onions)

nearly knocked me down.

Poor Patty didn't even have time to be surprised. With frightening speed, the burger-thing heaved open (sesame)

its ghastly, cavernous mouth and lunged. I saw that it had hundreds of teeny, razor-edged teeth at the ready. Patty was still smiling as the creature chomped her neatly in half, right through the midsection, forever dashing my hopes for a date.

I felt an itchy twinge somewhere behind my belly-button, but I started to giggle. I'd just had this absurd thought that someone had once *ordered* that ridiculous thing. Heh. I laughed while Patty disappeared into that undercooked gullet.

I had never

(seed)

seen anything like it, and it was clearly more than I needed to know. I was a

(bun)

bundle-of nerves. Without another thought, I high-tailed it outta there!

I ran and ran. Across the street, to Carl's Jr.

really by
STAN GIESEA

Get the idea? All entries must be received no later than June 1st to be considered. One entry per person, please.



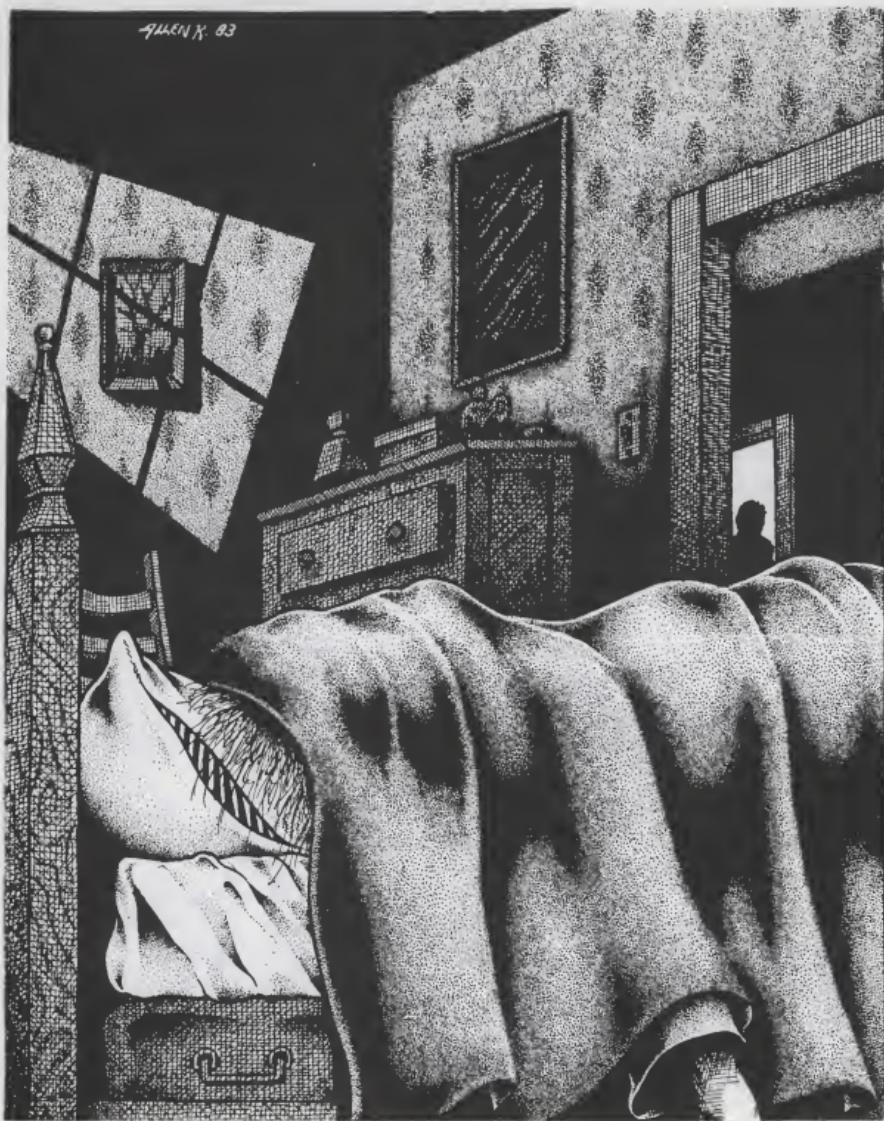
ROGUE'S GALLERY





P O R T F O L I O

THURX. 93



"GRAM MA"

P O R T F O L I O



"CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF"



"GRAVEYARD SHIFT"

P O R T F O L I O



"JERUSALEM'S LOT"



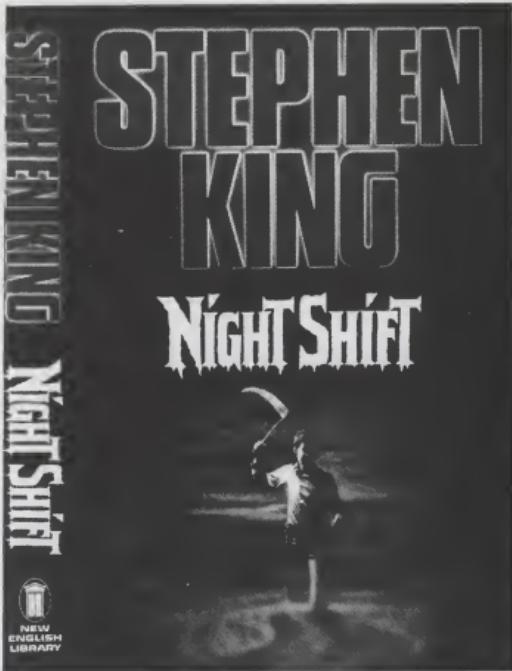
"THE MIST"

P O R T F O L I O



"POPSY"

Though you
shouldn't judge a
book by its cover, in
this case it's all right.



'You will encounter all manner of night creatures,' warns the author of this book. 'None of them are real. The thing under my bed isn't real. I know that, and I also know that if I'm careful to keep my foot under the covers, it will never be able to grab my ankle ...'

Despite describing himself as 'the nicest sort of fellow you'd ever want to meet', Stephen King is the author of four hugely successful horror novels, *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining* and *The Stand*. In the foreword to *Night Shift* he gives a fascinating insight into why he writes horror - and why people will always be enthralled by it. *Night Shift* is your guide through the darker side of the human mind.

Night Shift

Night Shift
by the author of *Carrie*
and *The Shining*

UK £1.75

STEPHEN KING



er &
ilton

The beautiful covers
on these two pages
are courtesy of
the British publisher,
New English Library.

'SALEM'S LOT

"If novels were awarded certificates
like films, this one would get a triple 'H'
for horror. *The Sun*

Thousands of miles away from the small township of 'Salem's Lot, two terrified people will share the secrets of those cupboard holes and tree-lined streets. One is an eleven-year-old boy. He never speaks but his eyes betray an indescribable horror he has witnessed. The other is a man plagued by nightmares, a man who knows that soon he and the boy must return to 'Salem's Lot for a final confrontation with the unspeakable evil that lives on in the town where no one is human any more..."

From the author of *Carrie* and *The Shining* - the
greatest living writer of horror fiction
STEPHEN KING

author of *Christine* and *The Shining*

STEPHEN KING

'SALEM'S LOT

'SALEM'S LOT
Enough blood, demons and terror
to give the most daubing readers the shivers...
Manchester Evening News



Cliff Burns

CATTLETRUCK

*"They flutter behind you, your possible pasts
Some bright-eyed and crazy, some frightened and lost
A warning to anyone still in command
Of their possible futures to take care
In derelict sidings the poppies entwine
With cattletrucks lying in wait for the next time..."*

— Roger Waters (Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut*)

I watch as the child approaches, swaying and bumping down the aisle as she combat the car's tricky contortions. She and I have been sneaking looks at each other since I was helped aboard by sickened porters three hours ago. "Man, you sure in bad shape," one of my dark, uniformed aides had mumbled.

I saved myself some pain by just nodding. The skin on my face is so tight that the slightest movement causes it to split open. Despite my efforts the blistered skin voids a good amount of purulent matter into the gauze wound above my head. The dried pus acts as a mortar, encasing my face in a painful papier mache mask.

There will be no relief forthcoming. The shortage of medical personnel means that I must travel alone, unintended, forgoing luxuries like periodic changes of dressing. It will be a long, excruciating trip to...wherever. There is a large displaced persons camp out on the prairies but I hear food is short even in the breadbasket of the world.

"Listen," the doctor insisted, "you can't stay here. We can't do anything more for you and we need the bed. It's as simple as that."

C L I F F B U R N S

I stared up at him accusatively. He kept his eyes on his clipboard as if he was reading from a prepared statement.

"You must have someone somewhere. Sisters? Brothers? They can take care of you. We're just overwhelmed, you understand?"

I turned my face toward the wall.

"It says here you're from out west originally. Well, there you are. They didn't get it too bad out there." He waited for me to say something but I would not oblige him. "We...we'll keep you here tonight but tomorrow you'll have to leave. I'm sorry. And I want you to know that I wish you the best."

I heard his shoes squeak on the gymnasium floor as he moved on, his arrival at the next clutter of patients greeted by cries of relief, pitiful pleas for morphine.

Don't ask for too much, I warned silently, because people who need too much—

The train is slowing.

Immediately I recall the reports I've heard of the recent resurrection of a lost art: train robbery. Bands of people crazy with hunger are tearing up tracks, deliberately derailing trains, burrowing in the hissing wreckage for a morsel, a mouthful, anything to line their acidic stomachs with.

They might like me, I come pre-cooked, ready to serve.

The train picks up speed again and the part of me (it grows more persuasive every day) that wants all of this to be over is disappointed.

During my reverie the child has advanced a few more steps, her gaze frank and penetrating.

She is a regular little dervish, this one, whirling in and out of the grasp of everyone in the car, earning indulgent smiles, chin chucks and the odd hug if the adult is quick enough to catch her. I have enjoyed watching her but have dreaded the moment when her inquisitiveness drew her in this direction.

Somehow she has summoned the courage to shamble toward me—one digit tucked reflectively in her mouth—and for that she is to be congratulated. But I curse her too because I can picture the scene that will transpire: the little girl screaming and crying, her mother rushing to her side to protect her from the mangled boogeyman, the reproachful glares of fellow passengers...*AS IF IT'S MY FAULT.*

I shake my head at her.

She pauses.

I thrust out a wrapped hand, waggle it in a shoo-ing

gesture. The concealing mitten only widens her eyes and mouth. She takes another step.

I sigh.

She's close now, close enough to smell me. Her little nose wrinkles daintily. But she doesn't run away and she doesn't scream and she doesn't cry.

"You look...funny," she says.

And giggles.

The statement is so unexpected, so cogent, so anticlimactic that I laugh along with her, a sibilant wheeze escaping between clenched teeth and out of my nostrils. Good laughter, not bitter. I welcome the pain that flushes my features.

"That's because I am funny," I grate, "the biggest joke of all."

"What do you look like, underneath all that gunk?"

"Funny," I shoot back.

*She cackles. "I know, but what do you *LOOK* like."*

I think about that.

How do I look?

I recall the poor souls pressed into service as assistants, orderlies, nurses and sometimes even surgeons in makeshift hospitals throughout the city. Men and women who'd had to acquire torpid hearts, rigid backbones, eyes that saw but refused to comprehend, voices that were filled with cheerful optimism as they cut away dressings and uncovered a person whose humanity had been caricatured by fire or flying glass. A few bodies revolted against the demands being imposed on them by the carnage. A big fellow, over six feet and swollen with muscle broke down as he removed the last layer of my bandages. He vomited all over the bedclothes, fell to the floor where he proceeded to kick and flail at anyone who tried to restrain him.

"He's a meatloaf!" He screamed. "A fucking meatloaf!"

How do I look?

"I look like...like there are big blobs of melted plasticine all over my face."

That earns me an "Ooooo."

I see the little girl's mother preparing to rise from her position opposite a young couple.

"You'd be great at trick 'r treatin', y'know," she advises me.

"Oh yeah, I do it all the time."

"Really?" Her expression is doubtful.

"Yeah. Got two Tootsie Rolls the other day." Actually

they've been in my pocket for ages. "Would you like to have them?"

"Sure!"

"Rachel?" Her mother is calling, craning her neck, trying to see the current object of her daughter's attention.

"In my pocket," I whisper.

She is torn between obeying her mother and the promise of a treat. Finally, she moves closer, reaches into my coat pocket, rummaging around and comes up with the candy.

I expect her to retreat from me quickly but she lingers. She reaches down, strokes a wrist, my fingers, cradles my palm, her touch gentle and intuitive.

"Does it hurt much?" she asks.

"Oh...sometimes."

She draws the hand up, plants a placating kiss on the yellowed wrapping.

Hot and salty, the tears slip down my cheeks, emblazon a crooked pattern of pain to my chin.

Stinging.

Burning.

"RACHEL!"

Her mother forces the wind out of the girl in her efforts to get her away from me. Rachel begins to cry.

"I'm really sorry—"

"It's okay, she was just—"

"—won't happen again, I'll—"

"—really we were just talking—"

"—for any inconvenience—"

"—please—"

The woman speaks to a conductor who helps her stuff Rachel's toys into a bulging shopping bag, escorts the two of them from the car.

My hands contract into tight, angry fists.

I wasn't going to hurt the kid—

I bring my hands up to my face, stare at them.

A week ago, an hour ago, a minute ago charred skin tissue and soldered cartilage prevented all but the slightest movement of either hand. My fingers had been fused together, ensnared in a web of tough, violet flesh. I required assistance for the simplest tasks like zipping up my coat or using the washroom.

But now...

I open-close-open-close my hands, marvelling at the complexity of His designs.



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SWEET PEA

By

REX MILLER

H E HAD COME
DOWN HARD ON
HIS WEAK ANKLE WHEN HE JUMPED
OFF THE HUEY SKID AT DAKOTA
AND HE'D HUMPED TOO FAR ON
THE BAD LEG. HE'D SLEPT WITH HIS
CUSTOM-MADE 15EEEEEE BOOTS ON.
NO POINT GOING THROUGH ALL THE
HASSLE OF TRYING TO FORCE THAT
RIGHT GUNBOAT DOWN OVER THE
SWELLING, HE REASONED. BUT
IN THE MORNING HE COULDN'T
FEEL ANYTHING IN THE RIGHT
FOOT AT ALL. NOT A TINGLE.

He stood carefully until he was sure his massive weight was distributed properly, and that the weak ankle wasn't letting that big foot turn outward with his weight as he took a few cautious steps, testing it. No problem.

Soon as he could he'd get the boots off. Soak the feet. Dry 'em good. Put powder on. He had dry socks in a sealed plastic bag. Dry feet and high ground. A big meal to fill that growling, obvulated gut. A long rest and then—with luck—he would find a vulnerable human and home in on that provocative rhythm of the life force, the heartbeat that would draw him like a beacon in the night.

He was far from Southeast Asia, however. Back in the world and years from the agonies of LZ Dakota. Yet it was not unusual for him to fantasize about past remembrances of pleasurable kills, and being the realistic pragmatist that he was, his fantasies conformed to a certain skewed logic. To remember the joys of the hootch girl he had ripped open in the boondies beyond Kontum a "hundred" years ago, he must take it from the top.

His name was Daniel Edward Flowers Bunkowski, and to look at him you would recoil in shock and fear. The height of a basketball player. The weight of two wrestlers. Hard, ugly truck tires of fat wrapped around massive legs like tree trunks. Thirty-inch arms with fists like steel sledghammers. Inside, deep inside the fat rolls, a tortured, severely abused little boy still lived. Living to kill. Surviving deep inside the core of a huge, tough, mountain of misanthropic blubber whose primary motivation was to find another human being and hurt them until they died and then take their bloody heart—the life source of the hated enemy. Daniel "Chaingang" Bunkowski. Expert killer. Hunter of soldiers. Executioner of mercenaries. Mass murderer extraordinaire.

Riding in the wrecker yesterday, seething with kill hunger and the desire to destroy the arrogant human beside him, his legs cramped, the right foot falling asleep over and over, the blaring radio and the obnoxious voice and the pain and the intrusive driver and the stupidity and carelessness that had put him in this situation all combining to threaten him, to almost push him to the edge of his fury—all of this washed over him in a bright, heated wave and he blocked it and fantasized about LZ Dakota, and the long, hot walk through the bush and then the steaming delights of the hootch girl.

And this is what he was thinking about as he bounced along in the back of the ancient truck. God knows he had hitched rides in a thousand trucks just like this one. Cutting unerringly cross country off the patrolled interstates, hitching the backroads of rural America in battered, mud-encrusted pickups, humping the boondies and killing when the mood struck him. Taking hearts and minds, he liked to say, and leaving the minds.

It was quite unpleasant in the back of the truck. The springs had long gone and his weight kept bouncing and with each new bounce reality intruded on his fantasizing and jabbed at him with another bony elbow of irritation, and Daniel "Chaingaing" Bunkowski's mood continued to darken. He was not a stupid man and the metaphor of a loose cannon flashed across his mental computer screen and brought forth an involuntary grimace reflecting his dour and progressively worsening state of mind.

The old man driving the battered truck drove infuriatingly slow, scrunched down with only the top of his head showing, yet despite the snail's pace he seemed to drive directly through every deep pothole on the road.

Enough with the bouncing. The bouncing hulk of a fat man was in a furious kill mood and his inner governor fought to done down the hot tide of rage that threatened to engulf him. He always tried to remember his beloved Mommy's advice—there's a time and a place for everything.

He'd bounced around for half an hour yesterday, cramped and angry in the cab of a wrecker speeding down a major highway with his freshly stolen car in tow. A moving billboard that said CATCH ME. He'd stolen a year-old Regal. Bludgeoned the driver to death and grabbed his billfold. Then, late that afternoon the thing stalls to a stop 20 miles out of the nearest city. He's been tired and cranky and the line between audacity and recklessness had blurred and he'd called Triple-A for tow service, using the victim's cards. Not thinking, uncharacteristically.

By dusk he's crammed into the front seat of a noisy wrecker, his rage mounting by the minute, the moron of a driver jabbering constantly over the blasting two-way with a dead man's car behind them. The victim's tags probably reaching the state rods hot sheets about now. All 460 pounds of him bouncing up and down, 6 feet 7 inches of enraged killer gritting his teeth.

He beamed now as he recalled how the arrogant driver had bragged of a gun he kept under the seat. Bunkowski had chainsnapped him not long after, firing the filthy weapon into the man's mouth with pleasure. These were his thoughts as his vise-like fingers gripped the side of the bouncing rustbucket.

The ancient pickup wheezed and rattled to a stop at the Mom and Pop crossroads grocery/gas station and the huge man drops from the tailgate with his duffel bag. The farmer driving the pickup has the old rattletrap moving even before the man's duffel has rolled into the road ditch, glad to be rid of the massive, hulking rider. He almost didn't stop for the gigantic hitchhiker but they had a cousin big like that so he gave him a lift in the back. Boy must weigh close to 400 pound.

"Goli," the man thought with a smile, "he's got to be fat enough to kill."

The crossroads store was a museum of obsolete signage. Five-O Chocolate Flavor and McCormick Dairy Equipment, Corn-Belt Feeds and San Felice Cigars, Perry's Dead Livestock Removal and Embro Hybrids still hawked their wares from the side of the road.

The big man, whose leg was hurting him at the moment, was hungry and he sat his duffel down outside, thinking how easily he could have killed that old man, thinking it without malice, as you might look to see what time it was, and going in the screen door with its little bell. He picked up a loaf of Wonder Bread ("Builds Strong Bodies 12 Ways") and took a plastic container of bologna out of the freezer tray. He took them over to the counter and pulled out a couple of filthy, crumpled, sweat-soaked dollar bills. The pleasant, elderly woman behind the counter smiled.

"Anything else today?"

"Thassit."

"Mighty hot out there," she said conversationally as she placed his change on the counter and straightened out the crumpled bills to place in the cash register tray. He picked up the coins thinking how easy it would be to crush her paper-thin skull and take the few bills out of the cash register, thinking the thoughts automatically as he always did as he turned to limp out.

"Yep," he said, "it sure is." For him this amounted to an extended exchange. He put some quarters in the Coke machine and took two large, ice-cold Coca-Colas outside, ignoring the lady when she said something about a deposit on the bottles and letting the screen door with its Rainbow Bread sign across it slam as he stepped out the doorway and sat down heavily on his duffel back to eat.

He ripped open the cool bologna and took half the meat and put it on a couple of slices of bread wadding it up in a large roll, biting off half in a savage chomp and chewing rapidly. The meat was good. He opened the bottles on one of his teeth as he always liked to do, especially if someone was watching him, and quickly chugged the large, ice-cold Coke in a single chug-a-lug swallow. It burn like fire as it went down just the way he liked it and he quickly swallowed the rest of the meat with a great handful of bread and washed the food down with the other cold soda. Ahhhh, he thought, as he belched expansively.

A large, swaybacked hound dog lay quietly a few yards away, his back and head covered with flies. The man absent-mindedly wadded some of the remaining slices of bread into a ball and tossed it over toward the dog who ignored it, probably wisely, getting up slowly and moving a few feet further away before it slid down to the gravel again. The big man sat there on the duffel, resting, looking at the old hound and thinking that he could kill the dog in just a few seconds, simply by picking it up by the throat and choking it until it stopped thrashing. He could kill a large attack dog quite easily. Even trained dobermans and the like offered him no challenge. They were very fast, though, and you had to be careful when you grabbed them or you could get bitten badly and it would hurt. He had no interest in killing

dogs and always avoided it whenever possible. He had once seen a man kick at a dog and it so enraged him that he had gone over and hurt the man very badly, leaving him with a dislocated jawbone and with an arm torn from its socket. He had since learned to control his temper better.

The big man sat and studied the signs of Clabber Girl, DeKalb, Dr. Pepper, 99 Brand Chew and Vic's Beer, as he nursed his swollen ankle. Finally the man pushed himself up with a groan and lifted his duffel bag. He carried the bag as easily as you would heft a bag of groceries and it weighed nearly 75 pounds. He was used to carrying 50-pound feed sacks piled on each shoulder, moving poured concrete forms, and similar work, and he could work all day without tiring. His own weight was another thing. By now, at the end of a long day, his hundreds of pounds were a real problem. He limped off down the road, heading toward where the farmer had indicated there was a hotel.

He noticed a man glance up at him through the window of a small office and he thought how he could waste the man by shooting him in the chest with a rifle. He had shot many, many human beings and he liked to shoot people in the chest area with certain types of loads because he liked the way the rounds would leave only a small entrance hole. He never rolled them over much so he didn't look at the exit wounds, just the ingoing wound. He really wasn't a shooter anyway. He much preferred the personal touch. It was good thinking about it as he limped down the road.

Once he recalled that he had shot a young boy with a handgun and thrown the piece into a moving truck as it passed by just as the police were pulling up with their sirens screaming and lights flashing. He had simply dropped back down to the fresh corpse and started giving the kid mouth-to-mouth as the cops came running over. It ended up that by the time the paramedic crew got on the scene there at the apartment complex where he'd iced the boy, he was the one that held the flashlight for the man who performed the emergency trache. He remembered that the paramedic said the boy had been shot, "in the left ventricle by an unknown assailant." He recalled the nice, neat little black entrance wound in the kid's chest and how he enjoyed thinking of himself as The Unknown Assailant.

When Daniel finally got to the hotel, a dump called The Flynn, he checked in and an effeminate desk clerk was somewhat brisk with him, asking him for the money in advance in a tone he didn't like. He was very tired and becoming irritable by now and he did not let himself think about how easily he could suffocate the sissy clerk with a pillow and then sever the artery in his throat and how the look and smell and feel and rush of the hot, squirting blood would excite him, pumping out with the beating of the heart, and he could not let himself think about what he called The Blood Flood.

That's how he got in trouble the first time. His mother's companion had been mean to Mommy. Daniel loved his mother very much and he liked to hug her and smell her freshly-laundered skirts when he had been a little boy and she made him

feel all cozy and warm and safe. But the bad man had hurt her and then one time when he was taking a nap little Danny Boy dreamed that he had taken a big knife and he had made The Blood Flood come out of the man's back, stabbing very hard and fast over and over and feeling the squirting, surprisingly warm redness fleck him as he plunged the blade into the screaming man over and over and over making the nice bright scarlet punctures in the bad man and he still recalled the details of his first killing dream. And the way that thought soon became dead.

Surprisingly the big man had always been very fast. Especially in his hand movements which could be blindingly quick and sure. He could even sprint a few yards with great and rather awesome speed, propelling his massive bulk on treetrunk legs made of muscle like coiled spring. Many humans were no longer alive because they had misread the man, misjudging him in one way or another. In a number of ways he was not quite what he appeared to be.

When Daniel had done the thing to his mother's companion they had sent the child to a bad place for a while, where bigger kids than him had hurt him, and teased and tormented him, and they had humiliated him down to his dark, unforgiving core. But when he was about 11 he started getting real big and strong and then he got even with most of the boys who were still there. The one boy, the real bad boy Kenny who had run the place among the tougher kids, he had forced Kenny to do awful things for a real long time and then he had made Kenny kill himself in front of everybody. That had been a lot of fun because he had not got into any trouble right away.

He had liked going to the funeral home and signing a book with his name, and he had even gone to the house where Kenny had been raised for a while and he'd told this one old lady how sorry he was and all that, and how he had been a friend of Kenny's. And he told her how awful it was that Kenny had gone crazy. After Kenny had killed himself none of the tough kids bothered him at all. Then once all six kids of the gang tried to jump him when he was alone. That's when he had got into the worst trouble, just defending himself. Some of the boys had got hurt real bad and that one had died. Daniel ended up doing some time.

He liked the jail. Doing time wasn't bad at all. The food was real good and he liked his room. He did not mind the hacks too much and he was a good prisoner while he was mostly with juveniles. He did his time really easily. It was only when they moved him that the trouble began. When he was mixed in there with the blacks and hispanics and older whites he had bad trouble. Big blacks had tried to make him do things and he had killed two of them up in the weight room, and broken a third one's spine when he threw him off of the top tier. He had escaped with a hostage, through dumb luck and the fates, and even though he stuck out like a sore thumb he had so far managed to evade capture.

The big man slept for 14 hours, got up and took a 30-minute shower, soaking his painfully swollen ankle. He would stay another night here and maybe take someone off. Then he

would get some money and a vehicle. No more walking, he promised his ankle. That afternoon he bought two fifths of Jim Beam, which he drank that evening getting half stoned, and a 21-piece bucket of fried chicken, a quart of cole slaw, two dozen rolls with butter, and a pint of beans. When he paid the girl he thought how much fun it would be to cut her throat with a straight razor and bleed her in the bathtub as he masturbated into her screaming mouth. She seemed nice and did not look at him funny.

He ate the cole slaw and beans with a little plastic spoon as he sat in his room drinking glasses of straight Jim Beam on ice. He liked to drink whiskey sometimes if he didn't feel good, like when his ankle hurt him. Even if it didn't taste good like cold milk or Cokes. He always felt better when he ate real good. After he polished off both bottles of the Beam he laid down on top of the covers remembering a whore he had taken off a couple of weeks back when he had first escaped from the can. He fell asleep thinking bout how he had killed her.

He slept real good that night and the next day he got up early, and paid his bill, leaving with duffel bag in hand, wandering aimlessly down the main drag. His ankle felt better today and he walked slowly, enjoying himself. He was oblivious to any stares today but soon gravitates to a less-populated side street and finally found himself on a quiet, shady residential street of dwellings that had seen better times.

One big, white house attracted his attention but he didn't feel quite right about it and walked on by. Still, it reminded him of something. Some fuzzy memory of kids being frightened of a haunted house. He thought the concept of being scared of anything was most amusing. Nothing frightened him. But as he looked down at it *he was the scariest thing out there.*

On down in the next block a smaller, well-kept house sitting back from the street caught his fancy. There was no sign of occupants being home but he sensed there would be someone inside which indeed there was. He wanted someone home today as he did not have enough money left for travelling. He walked up to the front door and knocked, looking around for neighbors. There were almost always people watching in this sort of neighborhood but he would allow for that. He could hear a dog barking next door inside or behind the house as an older woman answered the door.

"Yes," she said, from around the chained door. He could have snapped the chain with one finger, but he wanted her in the bathroom. This was not for fun. He needed money. He would have to restrain himself inside the house as he knew the temptation of making a blood flood in the bathtub would be very strong.

"Ma'am I'm just awfully sorry to trouble you but my car has broken down about a half a block down the street here and I've been trying to find someone at home where I could use the phone and call but you're the first person I got to answer the door would you mind terribly if I could use the phone just for a second I sure wouldn't take but a second and if it wouldn't put you out I would really be grateful!" The words came out in a

torrent. He smiled pleasantly, knowing that he had a radiant, rosy-cheeked smile that lit up his jowled face with a dimpled, quasi-innocence.

"Would it be too much trouble if I'd just come in long enough to use your telephone Ma'am? It sure would be most appreciated." He was capable of being extremely well-spoken and polite.

"No, I—come on in," she said somewhat against her better judgement and closed the door, fumbled with the chain that protected her from just such intrusions, and opened it as she stepped back into the room

The huge man came in gracefully for a man of that bulk, talking very rapidly and smiling as he always did when he laid down a con, speaking any nonsense just to keep a flood of words lapping at the other person's brain wrinkles—keeping their mind engaged where they couldn't reason too much. He spoke in a pleasant, deep speaking voice, speaking rapidly but softly and in a mannerly, almost deferential tone.

"—gonna buy a used car, again, Ma'am, I don't care if I have to make payments for a thousand years I sure don't get stuck with another lemon like this last expensive mess—" he droned on and on as he allowed her to step away from the open front door area, sensing the possibility of others in the house.

The woman is now only interested in getting him to the phone and back out of her life and she is starting to point the telephone stand out to him when her nightmare begins. She is suddenly dangling in mid-air, in lots of sudden pain, struggling to breathe as the huge man has one giant paw clamped down over the front of her mouth and the other over the back of her head. She breathes through her noise involuntarily but at the moment she isn't aware of this, only that she must get free.

Bunkowski carries her effortlessly from room to room, ignoring her mid-air struggles or the feeble kicks that he barely feels, quickly checking out the rooms until he comes to the bathroom. He squeezes through the doorway with the woman still in his two-handed clamp and holding her in his vise firmly stands her in front of the bathtub. She struggles wildly and just for a second he increases the pressure just a bit to get her attention as he instructs her.

"Listen to me very carefully, lady. Stop struggling and you will not be hurt. You are not paying attention." He has said such things many times before in many situations. "Listen. I will not hurt you if you stop struggling. LISTEN. You will *NOT* be hurt if you do exactly what I say. I do not wish to hurt you or rape you or molest you in any way but you have to do exactly as I tell you or you will die. Do as I say and live. If you scream," he adds menacingly, "or try to get out of here I will hurt you bad. Do you understand? Nod if you do."

"Okay. Now I'm going to let you go. Stand like a statue and listen to me. Don't scream. I'm going to put this towel around you for modesty. Then you will remove your clothing with this around you. I won't look or touch you it is only for *MY* protection, so that when I leave you won't go running into the—" but he sees it is of no use. The mention of taking her



clothes off has frightened her and she has begun to sob uncontrollably. He gives her a stinging slap, to him his lightest, gentlest love pat, but she cannot remember such a blow.

"You must stop crying. I don't like it."

"Yes, sir," she snuffles, "Please mister—" she hyperventilates a bit, but the sobbing has stopped and he lowers his voice to a whisper and rumbles in his warmest tone,

"Okay. Never mind the clothing. Leave your clothes on—okay? I know I can trust you."

Suddenly a noise intrudes and her mouth is sealed again in the vise of his left hand, his killing hand frozen at his right side as he eyes the door. Slowly he turns the knob, knowing as he does so he will see no one and he looks down and smiles as the noise of a small dog scratching to get in.

"I didn't see the dog." He loosens his fingers and she breathes, pushing dentures back in place.

"He gets scared and runs under the bed."

"Good dog," Daniel reached down and the dog backed up. "What's its name?"

"Sweet Pea." She begins crying again.

"I just told you I wouldn't hurt you—now why are you crying?"

"Nothing ever goes—I dunno," she is slumping, "everything is so—." He reaches out and catches her as she slumps, keeping her from sagging to the floor as she collapses again in tears. He drags her out of the bathroom, the small dog underfoot, and eases her into a chair.

"Get hold of yourself," he commands

"First he's gonna' kill Sweet Pea, and then YOU come in—and, an—" she can't seem to stop crying but she doesn't want him to strike her and she settles on a noise between a wheezing and a sobbing, and sits there going into shock.

"Just relax now. You're goint to be okay. Get your breath. Breathe deeply." The dog is watching from the hallway. "Who is going to kill your dog?"

"Those hippies next door. Mr. Gordon over there. He don't like him to bark. And he's a good dog. He don't mean—" and she's gone again.

"And Mr. Gordon lives over there does he?" She manages a nod through the tear flood. "Who are the hippies?"

"There's a bunch of them over there. They smoke drugs," she says. "They go out in the yard and tease the dog." She tells him mean things they do and his huge shoulders move up and down once in a sort of sigh. He walks into her bedroom and finds a stocking, holding it beside his leg so she won't panic when he approaches her again. He cannot endure more crying and he does not wish to hurt the old woman. The noise quickly ceases as he gags her from behind.

"There," he says, smiling his dimpled grin. "Now. You just sit there and be a good girl. Somebody will come along and untie you later. I'm leaving now. You forget you ever saw me—okay?" She nods as he ties her hands behind her, tying them purposely so that if she works on the know a bit she can free herself. "I'm going to take care of your hippies for you now

so don't be stupid and call the police or I'll have to come back here and tear your throat out okay?" She nods that she wouldn't dream of such a stupid act.

The huge man talks to the door.

"Goodbye Sweet Pea," he says to the dog, who continues to look up at him waiting for more information. And with that he leaves and goes next door. He rings. Nothing. He knocks. After a moment a man's voice growls through the screen.

"Yeah?"

"Hi! Mr. Gordon?" Chaingang booms in his friendliest basso profundo.

"Eh?"

"Congratulations! I'm Ed Frasson with American Magazines, and your home has been picked to receive a free \$100 gift subscription to any health club rassmon or grocery store certificate of your choice. You don't have to buy anything—how's THAT for a deal!" Crinkly, dimpled beaming bear.

"I don't want no goddamn magazines." Daniel sees long hair. A large, shirtless man.

"No, sir! Not magazines but ANY free service or product of your choice—free groceries, for example. May I come in just for a moment?" Dimpled innocence and need. "Here's an example of one of the gifts you're entitled to FREE, you buy nothing—" he is opening one of the magazines he plucked from the old lady's coffee table. Just something to divert attention as the torrent of words rushes down the mountainside and inundates the victim.

Every 20th word or so is a nonsense utterance. A rassmon or a frasson or a scranis-trace phrase and it SOUNDS like something but it's the tone that sells it. As close an approximation as one can get to enunciating a word, but slurred and mumbled and thrown into the current of verbiage to be lost. Something to befuddle, confuse, divert; a jumbled rumbled run-on wordscreen of deception and now it is too late as the man cracks the door for a look at the open pages and his is in a world of sudden steel horror and the 3-foot killer snake of links coiled in Danny Boy's special canvas pocket has chainsnapped him out of his fear-filled moment and Chaingang is moving through the house searching for hippies.

But Daniel finds the filthy home empty of other humanity. He feels no funny inside his head now as the warm rush of desire and rage washes through him and drags Mr. Gordon into his bathroom and wipes the man's bloody skull and matt of hair against the wall. He drags this heavy, inert man the way you would drag a box of kindling, effortlessly and devoid of any recognizable emotion beyond hunger, lust and anger.

He takes hold of the man's lifeless right hand and forces it over the hot water tap and puts the stopper in the cracked porcelain tub as the water rushes out of the faucet. The long-haired man wears only Levis. No socks or shoes on his filthy feet.

"You need soap," Danny murmurs aloud to the man, and almost lovingly he places a bar of soap on the floor at his feet

and grinds one of the large man's dirty heels down sending the soap shooting over to the wall. He drops Mr. Gordon into the tub, face down, to drown in the hot tap water, if he is not already a corpse.

He has killed human beings this way a number of times, with variations, and it no longer requires much concentration. He knows all the moves and his prescient mind, the mind of a physical precognate, that rarest of beings whose anomalous sensors transcend the ordinary or "normal" boundaries of awareness; this mind assures him that he is in no immediate danger.

He opens drawers, rummaging through worthless possessions, discarding weapons, pornography, the toys of the adult, narcotics, finally finding \$47 and taking \$40 of it.

How do you describe such a human monster? What do we say of his emotional baggage, the twisted behavioral patterns, the tilt of his mental gyro, the supernormal/supernormal intelligence package, degree of maturation and damage to the mentative machinery? How do we transliterate his neuropsychiatric survey into the mother tongue? We are translating Martian into Metric System, as it were.

What part of him will show on the CT-scan? Which aspect of the atrophy will respond to pneumoencephalography? Will the paroxysms and sharp waves and jagged edges and dangerous spikes show you Daniel Chaingang Bunkowski's voltage? Will the electro-tremors paint his true portrait for you on graph paper? What can you understand of this functioning but alien organism that is our brother? Is he real? Is he Man or Frankenstein?

He has just killed again. What does it matter if it is for the 386th time or the 503rd. These are numbers beyond multigigillions when lives are counted. Two lives is horror. Four lives is mass murder. How do we comprehend the brutal barbarity of the lives he has taken? So consider, if you will, that what he does now cannot relate to an action you will recognize. His next move, extra-terrestrial though it may seem, is to feel only deep hunger.

If I speak to you of the taste of death you will savor nothing. No residue of coppery lust will tickle your palate; no salty peptic invitation will cause you to salivate. You have not known cannot will not know the joy of ripping a fresh heart from a kill and sinking sharp animal teeth into its fullsome, bloody richness. Nothing is as wild or as satisfyingly, forbiddingly, deliciously *sweet* as the heart of your enemy.

He opens the door of an old refrigerator and this is what his brain registers:

- Diet Cherry Coke
- Pet Evaporated Milk
- Weight Watchers' Margarine
- Golden Farms Cottage Cheese

Golden Farms Pasteurized Milk—and he takes the carton out and sniffs it and drinks it all in a single gulp.

Eggs. He takes them out. Williams' Sausage. He slams the door shut and goes around opening things until he finds a

skillet. He breaks all 9 eggs into it and turns the heat high on the gas stove, striking a wooden match and lighting the burner. He finds a smaller frying pan and puts all the sausage into it and lights that burner. He takes a spatula out of the nearby drawer, inspects it fastidiously, wipes it, turns the eggs and sausage after a moment, and when they smell cooked he dumps the sausage into the pan of eggs and begins eating ravenously.

He finds some salt and pepper and sprinkles it in. Tears a loaf of Country Wheat Bread open and spreads a half of a tub of the margarine on two pieces wrapping them around as much of the egg and sausage combination as will fit and cramming that into his open mouth. He rummages around and finds something, sniffs it, decides it is honey. Takes the cottage cheese out and pours the honey into the container stirring it up and eating it in two mouthfuls. Not chewing. Inhaling it. Pouring the container into his immense hole of a shark's mouth and sucking it down in a noisy slurp.

He finds canned goods and opens everything he can find, noodle soup and beans and yams and canned spaghetti and more beans dumping it all into a big kettle and pouring the rest of the honey in and the rest of the Weight Watchers' Margarine to melt in and cooking it but eating out of it before it is cooked.

Chaihang finds a sack of potato chips and starts eating them too, but they are stale and he doesn't like this hippie food and for no reason he opens the refrigerator door and urinates into it, spraying lethal-smelling yellow urine across the jars of pickels and Miracle Whip.

Belching noisily, he picks up the stale chips and gocs back into the living room, turning the television on and flopping down in the largest chair with a heavy crash, spitting our chips as he watches a woman in an oddly incongruent cocktail dress turn letters on one of the idiot game shows the humans watch.

He tastes her in his mind and rubbing himself instantly becomes erect. He jacks off his penis a moment or two, then goes over and seriously masturbates until he can ejaculate onto the television screen. Milky white, poisonous-looking cum drips down the image of a man smiling fatuously at the woman in the cocktail dress. She applauds and turns more letters, as the semen drips down her dotty electronic image.

Pickup up a woman's blouse off the bide in another room he goes in to the bathroom and defecates beside the body of Mr. Gordon, wiping with the blouse, and then on the shower curtain, washing his hands carefully and blotting them on the kitchen tablecloth. He thinks about trashing the house but cannot summon up enough hostility. He wonders how soon before more humans will come. Shrugs. Sighs. And waddles out into the sunshine, saying to the absent, lamented hippies, whomever and wherever they may be, saying to Mr. Gordon, saying to the house as he leaves.

"Nine out of 10 accidents happen in the home." He smiles. He will not go back and rip Mr. Gordon open and write Sweet Pea's name on the walls but the thought amuses him as he leaves.

The Strange Case of
GARY LEVINSON



WHEN GARY LEVINSON moved from Miami to Hollywood in 1985, he hoped to follow the footsteps of former Floridians Fred Oley Ray and Alan Ormsby—old friends who had already moved to the West Coast and cashed in with modest measures of fame and fortune.

Three years later, it was impossible to read a Los Angeles newspaper or watch a local newscast without the name "Gary Levinson" being mentioned. But reporters were not discussing Levinson's career as a bit actor in films like "Armed Response" and "Modern Girls"—it was his "other" career that interested them. Following a

raids on his downtown Hollywood apartment, Gary J. Levinson was arrested for operating Fischer Publications, a mail order video company specializing in homemade videos that, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, "depicted explicit scenes of bestiality, sado-masochism and torture."

From a largely ethnic Hollywood neighborhood, just around the corner from the trendy Club Lingerie and within walking distance of RCA, Trans-World Entertainment and Mercedes-Benz headquarters, Levinson now resides in a two-man cell at Terminal Island near San Pedro, serving an eight-year federal sentence while he waits for state sentencing later

this year. His lifelong collection of videotapes, magazines and books are in safe keeping with a friend, but Levinson doesn't expect to see them anytime soon. Though "good behavior" could possibly reduce his eight-year stint to three years, failure to pay the \$150,000 federal fine imposed on him with his sentence could add five years right back on his time.

The arrest and conviction of Levinson for selling basically amateur gore videos caused something of a mini-stir through the circles of horror, fantasy and science fiction fandom that Levinson moved through during the years. Monster magazine devotees who collected the long-gone *Monster Times*, an early '70s

B Y D O N A L D F A R M E R

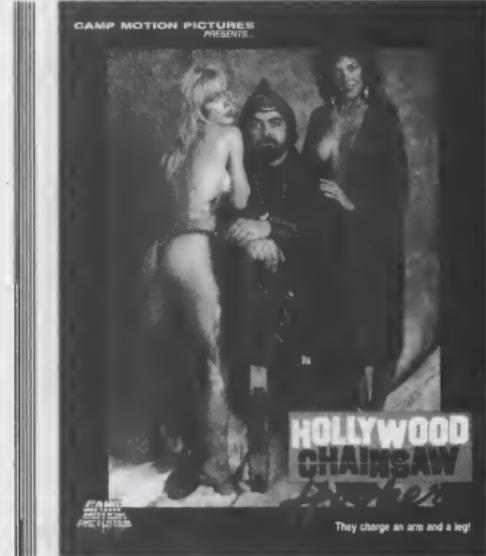
rival to *Famous Monsters*, might remember Levinson's humorous interview with John Carradine, and Levinson wrote the lead-off article—an eight-page history of American International Pictures—in the first issue of Dick Klemenson's *Little Shoppe of Horrors* way back in 1972.

Since free-lance writing hardly paid the rent, Levinson worked in those days as a combination sci-fi convention promoter and specialty publisher, doing quite well with a series of "Star Trek" conventions he organized in the North Miami area. He soon discovered a ready market for virtually anything with the "Star Trek" name attached, and quickly printed what he dubbed *The Star Trek Book*, a collection of previously published photos and superficial articles that he offered through mail order ads in science fiction magazines. *The Vincent Price Book* soon followed—this time Levinson totally eliminated text in favor of an all-photo overview of the actor's career. Fewer fans mailed in their checks for the Vincent Price tome, but Levinson's admiration of Price was reason enough for this pet project.

From "Star Trek," "horror fandom and martial arts journals," Levinson's home-based publishing company gradually discovered a world market for something light-years away from the bridge of the Enterprise. In 1974 the film "Snuff" became a notable independent hit with its hyped-up promise of an actual on-screen murder at the film's climax.

Levinson couldn't afford to shoot his own 35mm or even 16mm epic, but reasoned there might be a viable audience for "snuff fiction"—basically plotless stories which dwelt on drawn-out, excruciatingly detailed accounts of torture and mutilation. Charging sometimes hundreds of dollars for a single story, Levinson's new enterprise gradually accumulated a network of eager customers across the United States and in several foreign countries, "subscribers" who paid Levinson prices fees for his latest concoctions.

Reviewing Levinson's literary output, District Judge Laughlin E. Waters would later remark, "The dreadful, obscene, egregious material presented in court leads me to conclude that Mr. Levinson was pandering to a segment of society that is sick."



Of course, Levinson never denied that his customers could be labeled "sick" by most yardsticks of popular taste, but Fischer Publications was a business first, and Levinson had stumbled onto a largely untapped market—with no subject matter off-limits.

Armed with an instinct to offend that might make John Waters shudder, Levinson faced sado-masochism and exaggerated violence in "specialty" stories like "Horrors of Anal Castle," "The Great Atlanta Nigger Massacre" (written after that city's spree of child killings), "Bleed, Little Girl, Bleed" and "Die, Kiddie, Die." As these last two titles suggest, Levinson had begun responding to a growing demand by his readers for stories featuring themes of child abuse and murder. Since these stories were never illustrated with drawings or photographs using underage models, Levinson assumed that his business could expect the same First Amendment protection that kept Hustler, *Screw* and dozens of other explicit sex periodicals in business. But he'd assumed wrong—a point made at Levinson's first trial was that even non-illustrated stories of this type are subject to the same child pornography laws which outlaw the sale of underage child photo magazines.

But Levinson's arrest and conviction

were still years away. For the time being, he began taking notice of the growing videocassette industry which emerged in the late '70s. For a \$15 camera rental and a \$10 blank tape, it was possible to film up to four hours with color and sound—and without the risk of discovery by a film processing lab.

Latching onto the idea of shooting video equivalents of his stories, Levinson teamed with Florida make-up man Rick Gonzales, a notably talented effects artist who was later hired onto *Tomb Savini's* effects crews for the Florida sequences of "Day of the Dead" and "Invasion U.S.A." Together, Levinson and Gonzales first launched a new Fischer catalog item—gore still sets. For usually \$30 to \$50, customers could purchase color shots of the most demented make-up creations Gonzales and Levinson could concoct. The most disturbing of these depicted a nude blonde model, spread-eagled in a bathtub, covered with realistic cuts and ulcerations. Topping it off was a ring of convincing cigarette burns around her vagina. As a testimony to Gonzales' make-up skills, the photos were later confiscated by Miami police during a routine vehicle check and the driver—a friend of Gonzales'—had to convince authorities that these were not incriminating photos of a recent murder.



The next logical step for the duo was simulated "snuff" videos. Like the stories, a plot or any story elements were discarded for a documentary-style staging of a supposed "murder." The first of these was titled "Little Boy Snuffed," although the star was actually a youthful-looking 18-year-old. For nearly the entire 30-minute running time, we see Levinson cut, blowtorch, gouge and hack at his victim's right foot—a realistic rubber latex creation by Gonzales. Most who've begun watching this tape have found it difficult to sit through—I even resorted to squinting my eyes as Levinson gleefully rips off a toenail. As with most of his video projects, "Little Boy Snuffed" was produced as a custom video for a single client, who paid upwards of \$600 for the tape. To maximize profits, Levinson would then naturally include it as a mail-order item for regular customers—usually pricing these half-hour tapes at an inflated \$99 each.

During his last couple of years in Florida, Levinson regularly announced he was going nowhere in Miami and needed to be in Hollywood. His longtime friend Fred Olen Ray, who had made the move

west a few years earlier, was now churning out B movies like "Scalp," "Biohazard" and "The Tomb," and Levinson more than once predicted, "If Fred can make it, so can I!" Another Floridian, Alan Ormsby, had made a name for himself as the screenwriter of the "Cat People" remake and "My Bodyguard," so Gary felt properly psyched-up to bid Miami and his crumbling Cuban-American neighborhood goodbye.

I'd first met Levinson during a two-year stay in Florida (1984-86) while I worked on a technical training contract for one of the state's nuclear power plants. Levinson often criticized my admittedly dreary job and urged me to follow his example—"quit your job and make movies full-time." As far as I could tell, Levinson had never actually held down a job of the 9-to-5 variety, and I honestly did not feel his half-hour home videos qualified as "movies"—though there was no denying Levinson was making as much or more money than my power plant job paid, with obviously less work and time invested. But before I could envy him, I had to remember the types of people he counted

on for his income—would-be child abusers, masochists, golden shower devotees (yes, Levinson made those types of videos, too)—and decided maybe my job was not so bad after all.

The only reason Levinson had stayed in Florida up to this point was to keep an eye on his ailing mother, who had lived alone in the family's North Miami home following the deaths of her husband and Gary's older brother. After years of begging her to move to California with him, Levinson decided enough was enough—one day he began packing his mammoth collection of books, magazines, records and 16mm films, and shipped them out to Los Angeles, then bought a one-way ticket to the city where he knew he'd be famous one day. After settling in a run-down building on Wilcox—a typically seedy Hollywood neighborhood—Gary quickly picked up his mail-order operation and, as he'd hoped, found work as an actor in several of Ray's films.

In quick succession, Levinson appeared as a thug who attacks Lee Van Cleef in "Armed Response," a nightclub bouncer in "Cyclone," a caveman in "The Phantom Empire," and a cultist in "Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers," which he also co-produced. Levinson can also be spotted terrorizing Virginia Masden in "Modern Girls," frequenting bars in "Vamp" and "Dead Man Walking," and—in his most conspicuous role—as a crazed scientist who battles a mutant rat in the Bobbie Bresee pic "Evil Spawn," directed by Ray protege Ken Hall. As with "Chainsaw Hookers," Levinson also co-produced this direct-video release, and a color shot of him ripping a victim's arm off was published in Fangoria and appears on the video box illustration. During the same period "Evil Spawn" was produced (winter/spring '87), Levinson also co-produced and appeared as "Lobo" in my own direct-video movie, "Cannibal Hookers," which finally went into national release in September, 1988, after the original distributor—spotting a story about Gary on a L.A. news program—quickly cancelled our deal.

During this film activity, Levinson

also managed to increase his own home-video output—finding Hollywood filled with a steady supply of actresses willing to act out his customers' sado-masochistic fantasies. He produced the logical successor to "Little Boy Snuffed" called "Pretty Girls Snuffed" (three starlets murdered in a bathtub by an insane casting director), "Good Enough to Eat" (two cannibals butcher and eat a nude model) and dozens of similarly-themed videos—nearly all of them made in four- to six-hour sessions with a camera running almost continuously.

By now, Levinson was raking in an estimated \$30,000 to \$50,000 annually from his mail order operation, but—in this type of business—a growing client list brings growing risks. One of his new customers spotted a typically lurid ad for Fischer Publications in a tabloid accurately called *The Fetish Times* and began quietly collecting an assortment of Levinson's most incendiary videos and short stories. As it turned out, the new customer was actually an FBI agent and one afternoon—while Gary was away in Las Vegas—federal agents raided his apartment, seizing his Fischer masters, stories and—most damaging of all—his massive client list.

Levinson's mother had died a few months earlier, and he found the proceeds of her estate now going toward mounting legal bills, while he regularly appeared on local news shows as reporters milked the bizarre story from every angle. Most of his friends agree that Levinson seriously harmed his chances of a lenient sentence by appearing on TV and vowing that prosecutors "will never convict me." The Playboy Channel approached him about filming his trial for their "Sexcereta" news show, but his attorney advised him to decline the offer.

During his local hearing—which resulted in a six-month sentence—the judge grimly noted that Levinson began "laughing in court" while jurors viewed one of his videos, and terms like "sick" and "perverted" were heard more than a few times from prosecuting attorneys. Levinson's lawyer had reportedly reached

a deal where Levinson would serve no more than six months total—for local, state and federal charges—but the deal collapsed when Levinson apparently caught a bus to Tijuana and was arrested near the U.S./Mexican border. Any chance for a plea bargain was off—the federal sentence was now eight years and a \$150,000 fine.

Ironically, the single piece of evidence which hurt Levinson the most during his trial was a videotape his company did not even produce. The catalog ordered by the undercover agent advertised a dog-sex tape purchased from an outside source and then offered through resale by Fischer Productions. But, in the end, prosecutors pointed to this single video as representative of his offerings. The headline in the Oct. 13, 1988 *Los Angeles Times* read, "Bestiality Video Maker Gets 8 Years."

Levinson entered Terminal Island Prison in July of 1988, and wrote me that threats are regularly made against his life. "I had my first prison fist fight when a crazy guy attacked me on the yard," Levinson said in a recent letter. "I knew he was mentally and physically ill, so I was afraid to hit him. Once he hit me, I knew he couldn't hurt me. He only got in two punches before it was broken up by the cops."

"I'm in a cell 23 hours a day, with one hour out to play basketball. But I have to be careful, because people try to kill you out on the yard. I had a cellmate who killed a cop, and who keeps killing people while in prison! We got along great. This place is full of career criminals, including killers who don't care what happens. It's a weird place!"

For one of the last pleasant evenings before things began crashing down on him, Gary told me about attending the world premiere of his co-production "Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers" at Hollywood's Egyptian Theatre. Most of the stars of the movie—Linnea Quigley, Michelle Bauer, director Fred Oley Ray, etc.—were on hand. Gary's date was Sheila Best, an actress from our "Cannibal Hookers" picture who was better known as "Tara the Southern Belle" on TV's "GLOW Wrestling" show. Gary hoped Sheila would be suitably impressed when his name flashed on the screen as "Associate Producer," but he complained to me afterward that the B-movie launch had mostly left Sheila cold.

"What'd she say about your movie," I asked him.

"She HATED it," he said. Then, with a little trace of resignation, added, "She said she liked *REAL* movies!"





P A U L
S A M M O N

LAST ISSUE, THE LATE THEODORE STURGEON SPOKE OF HIS EARLY LIFE AND FORMATIVE influences. In this installment, Sturgeon discusses nudism, his writing, and his television/film work.

*But first, writer/producer/director Paul Sammon details his own impressions of the Theodore Sturgeon of the late 1970's (when this interview took place). *Midnight Graffiti* readers will also discover why Sammon's groundbreaking book *A Sense Of Wonder* (a massive collection of oral histories detailing the lives, bibliographies and filmographies of writer/screenwriters Harlan Ellison, Richard Matheson, Forrest J. Ackerman, Robert Bloch and Sturgeon himself) was paid for but never published. Finally, Sammon reveals what ultimately blew his relationship with Sturgeon apart.*

What was Theodore Sturgeon like in 1977?

It's been written that, as a young man in the 1940's and 50's, Ted Sturgeon was more than attractive. By all accounts he was a wiry Adonis who wrestled bulldozers and ladyfriends with equal aplomb (Sturgeon was both an experienced heavy machinery operator and, well, just a plain old operator). But by the time I met him, Sturgeon's youthful handsomeness was a thing of the past.

Yes, he could still balance the entire weight of his body on his outstretched palms (at a right angle yet, and on the edge of a table). But this was a mere gymnastic parlor trick. By 1977, Sturgeon was gnomic and goaty, with bell-like midrif that silently attested to the Campari aperitifs he loved to consume. The remnants of his physical beauty lay mostly in his eyes and gentle smile, in his wisful laugh and soft, inquisitive voice.

As for circumstances, financial success had passed Sturgeon by (actually, I suspect he couldn't handle money). Very much like Fritz Leiber, Theodore Sturgeon wrote compelling, important fiction for most of his life—only to find that what lay at the end of his road wasn't hard spendable cash, but soft critical praise.

TED
STURGEON



The
Last
Interview

EXCERPT FROM A SENSE OF WONDER COPYRIGHT ©1989 BY PAUL SAMMON

Last issue's interview with Ted Surgeon covered his fascinating origins and life, and ended with him in the Merchant Marine. In this second of three parts, Surgeon reveals how contemplating a life of crime led to a career in writing, and discusses his work and his views on nudism.

...I had the idea of robbing the American Express Railway Company of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of dollars. Which seemed to me at the time to be the perfect crime. I'd really researched it. I'd even written to the Express Company itself and got some details. The plan had to do with these mail cars they used to have. American Express used to use these travelling Post Offices in those days [ca. 1930], and I'd come up with a way of fudging on the weight of a shipment in jewels. And it really did seem like the perfect crime.

But I didn't have the immoral courage to actually pull off the caper myself, so I wrote it up as a story. I sent it off to *McClure's*, a newspaper syndicate that I had contact with, and they bought it. And I was so thrilled that they'd bought it that I quit my job and went ashore as a writer.

Do you recall the title of that piece?

I forget what the title was. But I do remember that it was a fifteen-hundred-word short-short. Newspapers used to run a fifteen-hundred-word short-short story every day, and they'd buy one, sometimes two of them a week. They gave five dollars apiece for them on publication. I had to wait for my money. [Laughs]

I then got a room that cost seven dollars a week, a walk-up, cold-water thing on West 63rd Street, where Lincoln Center is now. And I lived on five, ten dollars at a time for four and a half months. I learned a lot about making a stew out of six cents' worth of greens—two potatoes, a carrot, a stalk of celery....

You know how pound cake doesn't have any crust, they cut the crust off pound cake? Well, you could go to a day-old store and get a whole shopping bag full of it for a nickel. And I lived on that. Once I got a whole shopping bag full of it, and it was also full of mold. I was so hungry I ate it anyway, and got so sick that I didn't eat anything else for three days. So I saved some money, anyway.

I had all kinds of ways to save money. I used to go see my brother in Brooklyn. Subways were a nickel, so I used to walk from 63rd Street clear across Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge to see him, and then walk back again. Just to save ten cents. I learned a lot about money.

I knew some people in Brooklyn, and one of them was a woman who was writing confession stories. I was getting one-quarter or half a cent a word for writing them, and she was getting five cents a word. She was also the absolute monarch of her kind of writing. It was unbelievable how much money you could make writing confessions in those days, or probably right now, too. They paid like hell. And she was very good at it.

Her husband was an alcoholic advertising man who had always wanted to be a writer and couldn't make it. Which was one of the reasons, I think, that he was an alcoholic in the first place. Anyway, one day he came to me, slapped a magazine down in front of me, and said, "This is what you ought to be writing for." It was Volume One, Number One, of *Unknown*.

Well, I read it and really flipped out. So I went to see John Campbell, the editor, in fear and trembling. I was about nineteen years old. And that's really where it all began.

Campbell had an immense influence on you, didn't he?

Oh, yes. He impressed me immensely. He was quite a young man at the time, and just a huge guy, very tall. About six foot four, heavily built, sporting a crewcut. I remember he used to lean back in his chair and the chair would really yell for help. He had his office in an old building at 79 7th Avenue, which was the Street and Smith building. The presses were in the same structure, and when they started up there was just this subsonic rumble. That old building used to rock like a ship at sea.

Campbell was a fascinating man. He had the quality of being intensely interested in things, and of pursuing them. First, he would talk about something to you when you came into his office. He'd run over points A, B, and C on a particular subject. By the time you got back to him maybe ten days later, he was on M, N, and O, and you would have missed all that previous stuff. But it was all equally fascinating to listen to.

Campbell was also an incredible teacher, as far as factual matters were concerned, astronomy and so on. I remember him describing the mechanics of a nova to me. As the body of the sun shrank, he said, the pressure increased enormously. It had to explode. But because of the increasing gravity it couldn't explode. But it *had* to explode. But it *couldn't* explode. You got this image of this terrible increasing pressure. Finally, when it let go, it let go with one hell of a bang. You'd have this great flash of light in the sky that would last three or four days, and then diminish. Images like that.

His early stuff, too, was just huge in concept. He used to write as John W. Campbell, Jr., but he also used to write some of the most incredible fantasies under the name of Don A. Stuart. Which was his wife's name, Dona Stuart.

Such as "Who Goes There?"

Yeah, brilliant, a brilliant piece of work.

Or "Twilight."

"Twilight" and "Blindness" were two stories—I swear, every writer has in him a story that he is not capable of writing. "Twilight" was Campbell's, as far as I'm concerned. Because the whole concept and cadence of that story was so different from anything else he ever wrote. Every writer has one of those.

So are you saying that Campbell was one of the chief influences on your style?

Without question, yeah. As far as writing is concerned, he had a conciseness, an ability to categorize, that's been unmatched by anyone else I ever met. That reminds me of

"It is possible for one naked person to lie to another naked person, but it isn't easy."

something. You know, there's been endless discussion concerning the taxonomy of science fiction. Damn the taxonomies, they're killing our whole civilization! People who put labels on things in order to have labels on things, with the conviction that once you put a label on something you understand that thing—God!

The business of taxonomy is to put handles on something. I don't knock that. Because then you can grasp it, pick it up. But at that point the reason why you grasp it is to be able to analyze it, to turn it over, to examine it. To deal with it once you've got your handles on it.

But putting the handle on it is not a substitute for understanding it. This is the one thing that the taxonomy-minded people—who are most of the people in the world—simply don't understand.

Anyway, we come to the taxonomy of science fiction and fantasy and the difference between them. Now, Campbell could handle a thing like that. He was editing science fiction with *Astounding*, and fantasy with *Unknown*, both at the same time. And he says, "For *Astounding*, I want stories that are logical, possible, and good. For *Unknown*, I want stories that are logical and good!" There you go. That's the whole thing right there. No further discussion or elimination; that's it. That was his distinction between the two.

Another writer, Fletcher Pratt, used to hold these six-week seminars, and every weekend we'd all get together. The effort was to define science fiction, and we never could do it. During the course of one meeting, I remember Fletcher jumping up on his feet, pointing to the Northeast corner of the roof and saying, "All fiction is fantasy!" And of course he was right. Fantasy is the over-arching, just as sexuality is a tile in a much greater mosaic called sensuality. Science fiction is a very brilliant tile, but there's a much greater mosaic called fantasy.

Since you've raised sexuality, how do you feel about the tile called "pornography?"

I like it.

Staying with Unknown for the moment, your first published in that magazine was called—

It was called "A God in a Garden." It has not been reprinted for many, many years. It was the first story I ever sold

to a magazine, and it was the first story that was ever anthologized. As a matter of fact, virtually everything I've written has since been anthologized. Which is very fortunate for me, because my output has not been large. My whole literary reputation revolves around 114, 115 titles. That's everything. Short stories, novels, everything.

That naturally leads to the question of your writing habits. Are you a constant polisher, reworker? Do you just let it percolate? What?

There's virtually no way of putting out stories that I haven't done. By this I mean pre-plotting, or doing one or two or three drafts, or doing plot charts, or storyboards, or anguished pacing, or sitting and waiting for the Muse, or doing so many words per day—you name it. "Slow Sculpture," for example, was written longhand in a notebook in a laundromat, once or twice a week, a little after my son Andros was born.

When that was written, we were living in a house with about eight pounds' pressure in the water pipes. We didn't get a washing machine because it would take about an hour and a quarter to fill it up. So we used the laundromat.

Anyway, I used to go down there and wait for the clothes to come out of the dryer. I wrote in that notebook for six or seven weeks, on and off, until I had enough there to write a story with. And then I just typed it out of the notebook. It's amazing that it had the continuity it has, and the continuance of mood.

Another time when I wrote a story I had a bad writer's block. I was working for Time, Inc., and fell I really wanted to write something. But I'd come home from work and try to write and find that I couldn't. So I finally decided to turn the coin over, and create a situation where I would not be trying hard to write, but trying hard *not* to write. This is what I did: I decided I would double-space the typewriter and write to the bottom of the page. One page every day. And if I stopped in the middle of the word, with a hyphen, I would not write another word on another page. This created a situation where I'd get to the bottom of my page and say, "This is crazy! At least let me finish this sentence!" But I wouldn't let myself do it.

So in twenty-eight days I wrote a story that ran twenty-eight pages, and it came out beautifully. I've become one of the world's great experts at breaking writer's blocks. In almost any case, I can break anyone's block.

What you're talking about almost sounds like Campbell's definition of a nova. You were just tightening it up, and tightening it up—

That's right. You know, there are so many reasons for a writer's block. But writer's block is not one thing. It's a whole matrix of things. It's like saying, "What causes a runny nose or a headache? Or a cancer?" There's sixty-five or seventy causes for each one of those things. Of course, it's for you to find out which one is which. There are certain tests you can make to find out why it is that you can't write, and to be able to break it comes out in some amazingly different ways.

Sometimes I write, and the bulk of it has been written this way, where I don't do anything for weeks, or even months. And then I'll sit down at the typewriter and write. Write like hell for thirty hours at a stretch. Don't eat, don't do anything. Nothing,

'til I'm ready to fall off the chair. I'll have black spots in front of my eyes, and whatnot. Then I mail it off and lie down somewhere and convalesce. When I later read it over, it's first draft from beginning to end. It's not rewritten, not a word is rewritten; it's just exactly the way it comes out of the typewriter. And on later analysis, I discover that the internal architecture, the placement of subclimates and subsidiary characters, the crisis and the climax, all these technicalities are faultlessly placed. Now, where this comes from, I really don't know. There's a story I'm writing right now that I'm just finding out about at the typewriter. I'm not writing, I'm just typing.

At that point the story's done. It's not done in the sense of how it's going to come out. If you ask me, I can only give you the vaguest idea. But it does come out that way, and I feel a little spooky about it.

Let's continue with your personal past. I understand you were a nudist at one time.

I still am. I don't wear clothes unless I have to.

Did you ever have anything to do with organized nudity?

I used to go to a nudist resort. This used to be thirty years ago or more. I quit going there when the manager of the camp objected to the fact that I put suntan oil on my wife's breasts. It was okay to put it on her back, but if I put it on her breasts, they objected to it. I got so angry....

You wouldn't expect to find prudery in a nudist camp. The director of the camp told you this?

Yeah. They're very straight people. You know, one of these guys at the carnival can do your portrait, your silhouette, with a pair of sharp scissors and a piece of black paper. And he'll hand you this beautiful portrait which is very deftly done. Then he throws away a piece of paper that was behind the black one. Now, that piece of paper also has your portrait on it, and it's just as meticulously done. It's not where you are, it's where you ain't.

Well, sex in that kind of organized nudism is not supposed to be present. But it is present. Not because of where it is, but where it ain't. And they're just as conscious of it. That's the other side of the coin in that kind of situation.

The reason why I was drawn to nudism, the reason I live that way pretty much now, is because I'm sick and tired of humanity's ability to have secrets which aren't secret. The smaller a bikini gets, the louder it shouts, "Hey, everybody! There's a thing here! And a thing here! Look!" And the naked body doesn't deliver that message. But that's only an analogy, an analogue, for so many other things. People try to conceal the fact that they love something when they do love it. But they can't say it. They're afraid to say that they like people, or that they dislike someone else, because of what those people might say, and so on. Yet the thing is as equally transparent as the shape of a woman's body when she's wearing a bathing suit. It is not a secret. There's not anybody in this culture, surely, who doesn't know what a penis looks like and what a vulva looks like. So why you would try and conceal it and pass laws against it, and so on, is simply beyond me. The whole clothes thing is, really, the most errant symbol of the stupidity of the human mind.

That's what's so objectionable about political campaigns against homosexuals. Not that they're against homosexuals, but that they're really anti-sexual. Sexual fear is really at the core of those movements.

It is, indeed. And also the conviction among men that if we so much as lay hands on another man, immediately our voices will become shrill and our wrists will become limp and we'll go shrieking into the middle of the street. And everybody will know! That's an irreversible change, like changing a fried egg from a liquid into a solid. It can't be changed back again. Which is, of course, utterly irrational. But we do this politically, we do it philosophically, we do it artistically. The world is full of secrets which are not secrets.

You know, if you ever live for any length of time without clothes, so many things are in your favor. It has something to do with honesty. It is possible for one naked person to lie to another naked person, but it isn't easy. And if you live that way for any length of time, there's an awful lot of small laundry you just don't do anymore.

I would imagine.

This perpetual concealment of things that just aren't concealed really bugs me. But as a pot-smoking friend of mine once said, "I use it, but I don't sell it." In other words, I'm not going to confront people at my door stark naked, all in the spirit of nudism. There's a distinction between a nudist and an exhibitionist. I'm not an exhibitionist. I like to dress for my own comfort. If the atmosphere is warm, I don't like to wear clothes. If the atmosphere contains someone who is uptight, then it is no longer comfortable, and I'm at ease with clothes on. It's just simply not a preoccupation or obsession with me. As my friend said, I don't sell it. I do feel this way about it, however.



I don't have a lot of reasons for guarding my privacy the way I do, but that is one of them. It simply comes down to this: If I go to your house and obey your rules, then it's no sweat, no effort for me at all. I'm a social animal, and I try to be well behaved. And let's take it a step further than that. You can come to my house and obey the rules. But when you come to my house and insist that I obey *your* rules—that is something else altogether. I find that offensive. My environment is my own. For you to expect me to alter my behavior patterns just because you are there transcends the guest/host relationship.

So there has to be an overriding reason why I'll put on clothes if somebody comes into the house. This uptightness—I don't know how you feel about it, and I really didn't ask—but if I had happened not to be wearing clothes when you arrived, you'd have to shift gears a little bit. Try not to be aware of it.

It's not an obsession or compulsion on my part. You know, it bugs me to no end when I get a knock on the door and it's some stranger, and for reasons I don't agree with I've got to run upstairs and put on pants or something. God, that annoys me. So that's one of the reasons for the unlisted number, and the other circumventing.

Another reason I don't like to be unexpectedly disturbed is—do you remember the story of Coleridge while he was writing "Kubla Khan"? Well, he'd woken from this dream where he saw the whole poem laid out in front of him, and he began to furiously write it down. And then he was disturbed by this person on business from Porlock, and when it was over, he couldn't remember the rest of the piece. Well, that's another reason why I don't like to be unexpectedly disturbed. Writing's a slow process for me, and if I'm working hard and have to be interrupted—well, you see.

Next issue: Sturgeon on the Tube, on Sturgeon's Law, and on coming out of hiding.



*Paul M. Sammon is a writer/producer/director with over two dozen documentaries and one feature film to his credit. His latest film credit is as the co-screenwriter of *Stereotypes*, the first co-production of an animated film between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. As a founder of Awesome Productions (in 1981), Sammon has handled specialized publicity for such films as *Dune*, *Robocop* and *Blue Velvet*. He has also written extensively on film for such publications as *Omni*, *Cinefantastique* and *Cahiers Du Cinema*. Currently Sammon is the American co-producer of the Tokyo-based, nationally telecast (throughout Japan) television program *Hello1 Movies*. His short story "In Late December, Before The Storm" appeared in *The Year's Best Horror Stories: Series XIV*.*

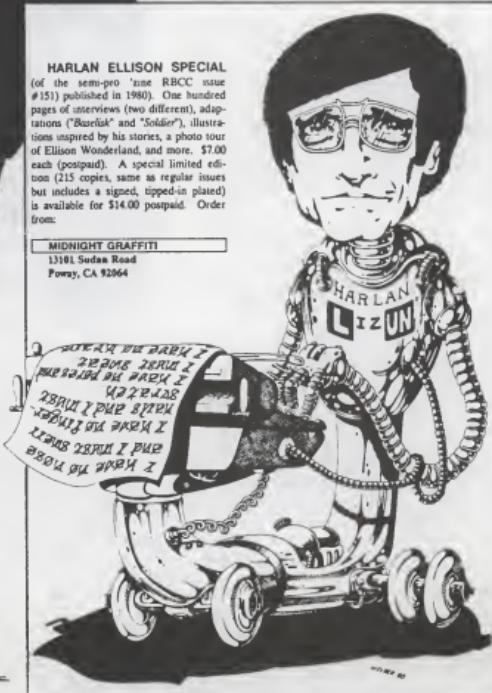


**"Ever since Maximum Overdrive, those RV's
don't seem to care who's watching!"**

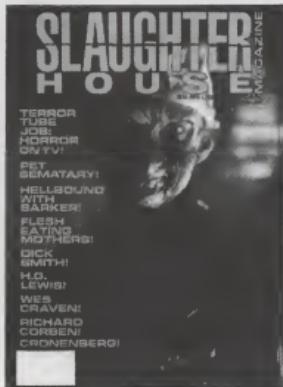


HARLAN ELLISON SPECIAL
(of the semi-pro 'zine RBCC issue #151) published in 1980. One hundred pages of interviews (two different), adaptations ("Barefoot" and "Soldier"), illustrations inspired by his stories, a photo tour of Ellison Wonderland, and more. \$7.00 each (postpaid). A special limited edition (215 copies, same as regular issues but includes a signed, tipped-in platted) is available for \$14.00 postpaid. Order from:

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recommendations



SLAUGHTERHOUSE

(2.95) HCS Associates,
Jim Whiting, Ed.
Delux Graphics, Art Director

We've missed issue one of this title, but issue two is out now; the one with Freddy Krueger and lots of exclamation points on the cover.

The cover is green and violet, by the way. Either the printer lost the yellow screen for the print or they were going for a concept here—all magenta, all green. All I can say is, it worked for me: I couldn't stop staring.

This magazine, unlike many, has an editorial "voice" reminiscent of Farry Ackerman's in *Famous Monsters*—except the character is a bizarre cat called Cleaver who headlines (and bylines) most of *Slaughterhouse's* features. There's no shortage of interesting stuff here—issue two features interviews with Wes Craven, make-up artist Dick Smith, as well as Clive Barker and H.G. Lewis.

There's also a very funny piece by reporter Brad Whiting detailing his at-

tempts to get an interview with Stephen King on the set of *Pet Semetary*. Salughterhouse's forte is splatter, lots of it—the color pages are reserved for graphic pictorials on *Night of the Demons*, *Hellbound*, and *I Was A Spawn*. There are reviews and a letter-cum-news section, and the cheap tape recorder interview with David Cronenberg. The look is a bit dicey, and the purpose a little incohesive, but you can tell these guys are having fun.



FEAR

(UK £2.50. \$4.95 U.S.) 82 pages.

If you loved horror and fantasy and had a crack writing staff, top production facilities, a terrific designer and art department, and spent a great deal of money, *FEAR* is the magazine you'd produce.

It is glorious. From the full color format (I mean virtually every page is full color!), slick paper, heavyweight coated

covers and superlative design, *FEAR* is a production artist's wet dream.

The editorial package is comprehensive, covering print, film and art. Issue one, which debuted last summer, featured fiction by Ramsey Campbell, Saun Huston and Nicholas Royle, interviewed Peter Straub and John Carpenter and lashed out at censorship in the UK. Issues two and three have kept up the pace, featuring interview with James Heriot, Dean R. Koontz, Clive Barker, Alan Moore, coverage of American films, British films, comics, books and videos. If it walks or talks or just plain scares you, it's in the pages of *FEAR*. *FEAR* treats dark fantasy like it should be part of everyone's life: it takes the world of horror and elevates it with serious consideration and respect.

Are we jealous? Yes! Are we awed? Yes! Are we threatened? Nah—they don't have an American distributor until issue six.

Seriously, *FEAR* is a bold stroke. It represents a tremendous investment of time, energy and money; it's what every horror magazine should be when it grows up. But there's a reason such a magazine has never been attempted in the States—a reason which may doom *FEAR* to a short, though brilliant, run.

The concept behind *FEAR* seems clear: it is an attempt to reach what the publishers (Leisure Monthly and Newsfield, a large UK publishing interest) perceive to be a broad audience for horror. In a world where Peter Straub and Stephen King can sell millions of books, where *Nightmare On Elm Street Part IV* does twelve million on a weekend, one reason there must be millions of people interested in horror—horror writers, horror films and horror magazines. Give them a classy package and they'll buy it. Make it respectable and they'll urge their friends to buy it. Soon, everyone will want one and Newsfield will



have a smashing success on their hands, well worth the money invested. (I'll guess their break-even point is a circulation somewhere around 100,000 based on my estimate of what it costs to get the magazine out the door, editorial, art, printing, etc.—about the circulation of *Omni*.) And though they're correct in their assessment—there is a huge market for Stephen King books and Freddy Krueger movies—there are no statistics to support that success washing down to a magazine format. People like to experience horror but they don't necessarily like to read about it.

The sad truth is that the best-selling magazine in the world is *Reader's Digest*, followed closely by *TV Guide*, *Woman's Day* and *The National Enquirer*. Then the titty magazines, then *Time*, *Newsweek* and the like. Down, down the spiral goes until we reach the little guys: *GQ*, *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*. Under the bottom line are magazines like *Twilight Zone* (Now defunct), *Starlog* (80,000 cir), *Fangoria* (60,000 cir) and way, way under that are mags like *American Cinematographer*, *Cinefantastique* and for the moment...*Fear*. (Hey—we're not even on the chart. But we have fun!) With more dollars per page than a year of production costs for the *National Enquirer*, economics will determine the fate of this noble experiment.

But we hope the experiment succeeds. Fear should be a part of everyone's life. Find it. Buy it.

P.O. Box 20,
Ludlow, Shropshire SY81DB,
United Kingdom
John Gilbert, Ed.
Dave Westerm, Art Director

FLY IN MY EYE

\$9.95 (B&W, 224 pages.)

Steve Niles, Ed. Dan Steffan, Art

Is it a comic? Is it a magazine? We're not sure, but we hope it's going to be a continuing effort. *Fly In My Eye* is Arcane's second publishing effort, though the first of what they promise will be a quarterly graphic/prose extravaganza. Eighty percent of *Fly's* 224 pages features short graphic horror stories by artists and writers such as Steve Bissette, John Bolton, Elman Brown and the cryptic SMS. The art of Clive Barker is featured in this issue, though it is overshadowed by the other talents splattering the pages.

And there is prose. John Shirley's short story "The Rubber Smile" doesn't soar as some of his work has in the past: though craftsman-like with an interesting twist on the horror of movies, it offers few surprises.

Biographer and interviewer par excellence Douglas E. Winter's entry shows his skill as a fiction writer in his story "Streetwise." This story, hand-lettered and illustrated by Elman Brown, starts brilliantly, promising much, then ends fast and badly. The culprit may have been the procrustean bed of the editor, but we hope

Winter will resurrect the fascinating character he created in this short work.

Fly In My Eye is representative of a new hybrid whose grandaddy was *Heavy Metal*: the interweaving of graphics and prose, with the accent on graphics, the whole mix unified in this case by the focus, dark fantasy. It is both entertaining and disturbing, and at times confusing. But what isn't?

Arcane, Inc.,
715 Eighth Street S.E., Suite 300,
Washington, D.C. 20003

TABOO #1:

Once past its charming Stephen Bissette cover and the obligatory introduction by the top horror writer, readers of the new horror anthology comic book *Taboo* are in for a diverse blend of graphic horror stories.

The most deeply disturbing of the lot, "Come On Down," is written by the best writer of comics, ever, Alan Moore, and illustrated by Bill Wray. This concerns a television game show that panders not to its audience's avarice, but to a more specialized, and more terminal, desire. Moore comments in the introduction that the horror of the story lies in the fact that its characters are not victims but that they "want" grotesque things to happen to them." Wray's illustrations underline the dark humor of the piece, which touches a very deep chord in the heart of this television viewer. Vanna White will never quite look the same.

Another story, Robert Loren Fleming's "Chigger and the Man," veers into even deeper waters of psychosexual

fear. Keith Giffen illustrates in a style ideally suited to the story's cramped, sweaty atmosphere. Unfortunately, the style in question belongs not to Mr. Giffen, but to exiled Argentine artist Jose Munoz. To put it as discreetly as possible, Mr. Giffen quotes extensively from Munoz' work. His occasional use of childish drawings raises the suspicion that he's been casting an envious eye upon the work of Bill Sienkiewicz. If Mr. Giffen must borrow from others, this reviewer would like to steer him towards the work of Don Heck as a style-source more perfectly matched to Mr. Giffen's integrity.

Fortunately, *Taboo* contains work by several artists whose integrity and originality are above reproach, even if their taste is not. Charles Burns' "Contagious" addresses every teenager's concern with maintaining bodily integrity. That other top teen interest, sex, not only raises its ugly head but proves, in this case, to be utterly inimical to the physical well-being so profoundly desired.

S. Clay Wilson, biker cartoonist from hell, contributes a two-page story, "The Kitty Killer Kids," that is damnable but comic, if not downright charming, when compared with his usual underground work. Despite the absence of scatological torments and vampiric fellatrices, it nevertheless conveys the twisted imaginings that give his work its raw power.

The sickest talent represented herein, and the most brilliant, is Canada's Chester Brown. "Dirk the Gerbil," an eschatological funny animal story, reflects his obsessive concern with religious imagery, best displayed in his own magazine, *Yummy Fur*. A companion piece, "A Late Night Snack," is far more horrific in its present form than it would be with a human cast, but is far from his best work. This reviewer suggests that anyone seriously interested in comic art as an outlet for truly individual visions should take a more extensive look at the work in *Yummy Fur*. The Bible stories alone are worth the cost of admission!

The rest of the material in *Taboo* is well-written, although "Eyes Without a Face" brings back memories of the worst of Warren Comics. The two stories illustrated by Mike Hoffman, "Tooth Decay" and "Throat Sprockets," are solidly drawn, with a clean Wally Wood influence. Mr. Hoffman is, however, his own man: "influence" means "influence," and I would *not* say that Keith Giffen was "influenced" by Jose Munoz. Stronger words are required for Mr. Giffen, but this is, after all, a family publication, and discretion is the editorial byword of the day.

"Throat Sprockets," written by Tim Lucas, is, unlike "Chigger," a subtle look at an unusual sexual hang-up: a distracted yuppie finds a porno theater that caters to a rather refined (and strangely safe) fetish. As is usually the case with the prints at porno theaters, a crucial amount of footage is missing...

Bissette's "Cottonmouth" defies description. It may very well be the ultimate story of this anthology in terms of topicality, justifiable vengeance and the utter revulsions it inspires. Beyond that, it's a pretty nice little story.

Taboo is an anthology of generally high quality, with the one painful exception already noted to excess above. And even that isn't too terribly bad. If it had been drawn by Jose Munoz and written by his collaborator Carlos Sampayo, it would probably have been the standout of the collection. As it stands, *Taboo* is a fine book, highly recommended.

— W.H. Booth

Spiderbaby Graphix,
P.O. Box 442,
Wilmington, Vermont 05363

(This space, though usually reserved for books we like or at least can recommend, is being turned over to magazines this issue. So many have come out in the last few weeks, so many that deserve attention and mention, WE HAD TO DO IT! So as not to offend the nice folks that send us their latest, we'll review everything of merit next issue.— Ed.)

COMING NEXT

S T R A Y T O A S T E R S



BUTTERED
ON BOTH SIDES?

Comics

“show
me
your
teeth!”



©WILBER 88



PHANTOM OF THE OPERA #1:

Eternity Comics

With everyone going *Phantom* crazy with the runaway success of the Broadway play, various versions of Gaston Leroux original story have been brought back into print as well as bound for the screen. The black and white reprint from an early Seventies horror magazine is a good adaptation of the story. But while everyone at Eternity makes certain that their title appears in the comic, the name of the artist who drew all of this is conspicuously absent. Hey, guys, he drew it long before you decided to print it, so how about recognizing his contribution?

The cover of the comic is another uncredited rendering of *The Phantom of the Opera*, this one based on the more recognized movie version of the character from decades past, and which differs markedly from the equally ghastly version portrayed inside the comic.



FIFTIES TERROR #1:

Eternity Comics

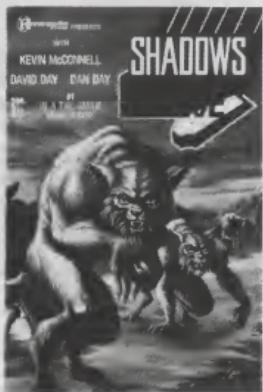
Horror comics in the Fifties tended to follow a style which was established by the E.C. Comics line of the early Fifties. Set

up a story and build to a twist ending. The only problem with this approach is that when you've been groomed to expect a surprise ending, it's hard to be surprised as you can usually second guess the writer. Some of the stories in this book, if not all, read as though the authors and artists were striving to imitate the E.C. style, and succeeded in bringing more craft than normal to the storytelling than is generally found in most Fifties comics.

These stories all appeared in 1953 in either *Witches Tales* or *Tomb Of Terror* although none of the artists are identified, even though their work is much better than average. Two of the stories, "The Rift Of The Maggots" and "Undertaker" seem to be the work of Howard Nostrand even though it looks very much like the art of Jack Davis. While Jack Davis' art is much imitated today, particularly in advertising art, I believe that Nostrand was the only artist in the Fifties who recognized the range and effectiveness of the style of Davis, who could draw both humor and horror art without ever changing his approach to the material and yet to equal justice to each. Nostrand's art is all but forgotten now except by old time collectors.

The middle story in the issue, "I'll String Along," is an uncredited adaptation of the Ambrose Bierce story "An Occurrence At Owl Creek Bridge" in which a hanged man hallucinates that he's escaped the gallows.

There's a second issue of *Fifties Terror* although the stories reprinted aren't as interesting or as slick as those in the first issue.



SHADOWS

FROM THE GRAVE #1
and #2 (in a two-issue mini-series)
Renegade Press

This anthology horror comic was published in 1987 & 1988 and all the stories are written by Kevin McConnell. The art is by David Day and Dan Day, although Dan doesn't ink every story. Those which are inked by Dan look the best as his slick, precise style adds a special lustre to the art. Dan's work is primarily in evidence these days in the excellent Sherlock Holmes comic, also published by Renegade Press.

The style of the stories is familiar to anyone who has read more than a few issues of any E.C. comic or early numbers of Creepy and Eerie. They're dark, moody exercises which lead up to a "surprise" ending which usually isn't much of a surprise to anyone who has read very many horror stories or comic books.

Starting off with the first issue, the lead story, "A Grave Mistake," is a well told story about a grave robber who robs one too many graves. The ending is the least interesting of the many possible choices the author could have made.

"Purgatory" is a more interesting little nine page entry which manages to pull off the difficult but interesting mix of the western and the horror story. While one can sense some distant inspiration from the movie *High Plains Drifter*, it stands on its own and works quite well.

"Flesh And Blood" is a strange little exercise which seems to be dark fantasy but ends in a twist which reveals it to be psychological horror. It's well handled although the art by David Day is not as good when bereft of the strong inking of Dan Day.

Issue two opens with a three page story set in the days of ancient Rome and reveals what happens when a vampire tries to put the bite on Jesus Christ.

"Creeping Up With The Joneses!" reads like a typical E.C. tale which chose to leaven its horror and crime suspense stories with a dose of commentary on the times in which we live.

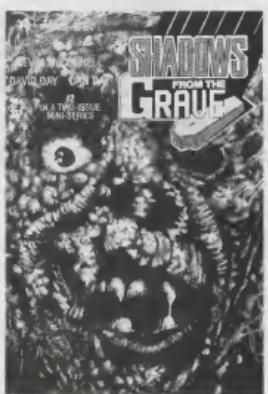
"Burial Rites" is an interesting little oddball short about a corpse coming back to get its Teddy bear! Told with four vertical panels per page, it's an effective piece.

"Epitaph" is a story which drags on for fourteen pages and ultimately fails due to faulty research by the author. An unnecessary framing device has an astronaut finding the diary of Jack the Ripper, written shortly before the man supposedly died in 1849. Unfortunately, it's an easily discovered fact that Jack the Ripper did not launch his reign of terror in London until 1888! Thus the author's attempt to have Jack being responsible for the death of Edgar Allan Poe and all of the rest he tries to pull off ultimately falls to the ground.

That neither the artist of the story, nor the publisher and editor of the comic, noticed the author's blunder is not to their credit.

The wraparound painting by David Day on issue one of a pack of werewolves reveals that he is a much better painter than he is an inker. Dan Day provides a fine front cover on issue two of a close-up of the face of a corpse.

These aren't bad comics, and as is the case with any collection of stories by a single author, the writer's strengths as well as his weaknesses tend to be on display when viewed overall.



GORE SHRIEK #5:

Fantaco Enterprises Inc.

If you're looking for a comic whose cover is emblazoned with the label **WARNING: CONTAINS DISTURBING MATERIAL AND IS NOT INTENDED FOR CHILDREN**, then you've come to the right place. And while this issue contains some definitely violent scenes, the authors seem to have more on their minds than that as we never get the feeling that they've been gleefully rubbing their hands together until they can get to the parts where they can splatter ink on the page, such as is conveyed in the comic *Faust*.

"Fallen Leaves" by Rick McCollum and Bill Anderson is a well written tale

about a Greek immigrant who keeps a strange tree in his yard flourishing with the blood and entrails of small animals. The story is interesting but it's never made clear why the man never revealed the truth to his daughter about her origin since it would have been quite easy to prove. Also, the ending seems contrived and not as interesting as the ideas the story uses to get there. The theme would bear reworking into a totally different kind of tale, albeit one which probably wouldn't climax in quite the same way.

"The Warren Empire: a personal view" by Archie Goodwin is an historical retrospective on the magazine empire of James Warren told by someone who was there when Warren began *Creepy* and *Eerie*. But as detailed as it is, the piece remains factual without revealing anything which hadn't been set down before by those of us who merely read the publications. For whatever reason, Goodwin chooses not to reveal the sometimes unpleasant behind-the-scenes problems (the first editor of *Creepy*, Russ Jones, being one example left untold), nor does Goodwin describe any of the strange events surrounding the collapse of Warren Publishing and the mysterious disappearance of James Warren himself. Virtually anyone who ever worked for Warren has anecdotes to relate and Forry Ackerman is always discussing his observations of Warren in any of the interviews Forry has done in the past few years. Archie Goodwin's overview seems to be told with a deliberate sense of distance woven into it, the kind one would not expect from someone who was there on the inside.

"Mal Occhio" by Chris Pelletier is a story which opens with a quote from Poe's "The Cask Of Amontillado" and thereafter tells its ten page story without words, but does so quite effectively. The story of what happens after the funeral of someone who seems to be some sort of Mafioso figure, is told in a style reminiscent of the art found in underground comics of the early Seventies and evokes its horror with more implied than graphic violence.

The centerspread by Charles Balun is an overly busy rendering of a parody movie poster for a film entitled *Zombie Buzzsaw Apocalypse 2000 AD*. It would have been more effective had it been less

crowded and thus would have achieved the look of a genuinely bad movie poster such as it was striving for.

"Intruders At The Gates Of The Mind" by Tom Veitch runs for nineteen pages and is just part one of a detailed look at horror in the underground comics of the Seventies. It shows how much experimentation with non-traditional horror was taking place there long before the movement which has been so much talked about in the novels and short stories of the Eighties.

"The Bleeding Mirror" by David Marshall tries very hard to be intense and different, but cannot rise above being inevitably incoherent. The writer/artist still deserves marks for making the attempt.

And first but not least, the cover by Bruce Spaulding Fuller portrays a human head carved into a jack o'lantern! Candle and all. It's a gory piece of business, but just what you'd expect on the cover of a magazine called *Gore Shriek*.

Although this title doesn't feature many of the more recognized talents which the late, lamented *Death Rattle* did, it's attempts to explore the modern range of horror in the graphic story are at least as bold.



A CASE OF BLIND FEAR

Eternity Comics

Last year Eternity published the well received *Scarlet In Gaslight* which told the tale of Sherlock Holmes encounter with Dracula. Now the same creative team of Martin Powell and Seppo Makinen return in this new mini-series in which Holmes meets none other than the Invisible Man



(as he was characterized by H.G. Wells).

This issue leads off with a fine color cover which shows just how powerful and effective color can be when used by someone who truly understands color, tone and contrast. Even though blue, green and brown predominate the color scheme, it is used just right to give dimension to the image rather than just splashed on to fill up the lines. The hunched figure of the shabbily attired Invisible Man predominates the foreground, his bandage-swathed face revealing him to us. In the background, Holmes leans over a body, the yellow glow from his hand-lamp bathing the scene and reflecting back on his garb as the biting wind tugs at his scarf. Everything about the rendering of the cover captures the classic style of this story, promising the same sense of wonder we encountered years ago when we first read the Victorian fantasies of H.G. Wells as adapted by Classics Illustrated.

Even though this is in black and white, the rendering is perfect for the story being told, beginning as it does in the midst of an icy London winter when a shopkeeper encounters a visible man who has invisible skin! The narrative which follows is as deft as it is swift as Wells pieces together clues which point to the impossible. Even Watson, who tends to be a tagalong in most Holmes stories, emerges as an important figure in the unfolding drama.

The first of four issues, *A Case Of Blind Fear* promises to be at least as good as *Scarlet In Gaslight*, and perhaps even better. Martin Powell is a very literate and entertaining writer, telling stories which no one else is even trying to tell and elevating the pastiche to a level of respect seldom earned.

Frankenstein

Published by Eternity Comics,
1355 Lawrence Dr. #212,
Newbury Park, CA 91320

If there's been any other literary character more used and abused than the Frankenstein monster, I can't imagine who it could be. It's probably neck and neck between whether it's appeared in



more comic books or movies, although comics have probably attempted to do the character correctly more often than films have. The best Frankenstein comics to date remain those drawn by Mike Ploog and adapted by Gary Friedrich in the early Seventies, although to a child of the Sixties the bloody Classics Illustrated adaptation will remain forever seared into our memories.

Only someone who has actually read the original Mary Shelley classic can appreciate the violence done to it over the years. Martin Powell, whose stylish Sherlock Holmes' pastiches display a high level of craft, is on the job here adapting that nineteenth century classic. Certain events are condensed here and others are rearranged as the story opens close to where the novel ends and cuts back and forth as Victor Frankenstein remembers his youth and the follies which brought tragedy to his adult life. Effective scenes of past events are woven into nightmares, making this a more complex and well thought out adaptation than one usually encounters.

The art by Patrick Olliffe is moody and high effective, whether rendering scenes of nightmarish intensity or gentle interludes of childhood memory.

The only unfortunate thing is that this comic may be overlooked as Eternity has been filling the stands with comics reprinting material in other horror categories such as werewolves, the Phantom of the Opera, etc., and this might be passed over as being just one more of those when it's actually an all-new adaptation rather than

a warmed over concoction of reprinted material.

Although not stated in the book itself, this has been announced as being a three-issue mini-series. Don't pass it up!



BLOODSCENT

Comico The Comic Company

This is an interesting tale of horror which doesn't tell a story so much as it tells the end of a story. Told entirely through captions and artwork, it relates the incidents following a murder committed by a serial killer. We learn what he is thinking about and what drives him to the killings of strangers, and the fear he feels when he believes he's about to be captured. Upon fleeing the scene of the crime and running through the woods, the killer hears the sounds of pursuit and is attacked first by bats, and then a wolf. Finally he's cornered by the man and two women he saw, and finds the body of his victim, and what follows is obvious. What makes it all work is the tight, crisp descriptions by author Dean Allen Schreck of the killer's state of mind leading up to his epiphany at the climax.

The artwork by Gene Colan is some of his finest and the coloration by Steve Oliff is carefully thought out to enhance the artwork just right. It's always pleasant to see when a colorist has obviously read

the story before coloring it so that he can decide exactly what will best enhance each scene rather than hurriedly just tinting each page in order to crank it out as quickly as possible, such as some comic book colorists unfortunately do these days. The colorist on a book is all too often overlooked for how he can strengthen a story, as well as how he can detract from it when his work is subpar and ill considered.

The backup feature is a four page text story by Dean Allen Schreck which carefully describes a woman's dawning sense of her own insanity. Psychological horror is difficult to do effectively since it is so internal and involves more thought than action, but Schreck handles this story well.

This is yet another type of horror comic. One which, while visual, depends more on words than image to evoke mood. While "Bloodscent" itself is a comic book story, it reads more like a tightly written short story. And while one can fully understand the story from the art without reading a words, it's the text which involves us and reveals the texture and intent.



Northstar Publishing,

The term "Adult Comics" has become a label which is sometimes used as an excuse to indulge in areas which more literate and accomplished writers and artists choose to ignore. Even the so-called "Splatter" fiction, when it's done well, has

a point to it which is a little bit more involved than that the bad guys gotta' die in the most grisly fashion imaginable. But then that's the difference between comics and prose fiction. All too often comic books are about fights rather than about telling a story. *Faust* is an example of that taken to an extreme; an exercise in graphic violence which obviously would not exist without the chance to produce violence graphically.

In the preface written by the author of *Faust*, he defends portraying murder in a non-sanitized fashion. I have nothing against this. But there's a difference in portraying violence realistically and indulgently. Tim Vigil's artwork revels in its portrayals of bloody mayhem as though the gory attacks are what it's all been building up to. They are the focal points of the story the same way that underground comics first overindulged in graphic sex and violence as a release from the restrictions of the realm of the Comics Code Authority. Without the parade of bodily fluids and bloody entrails, the author wouldn't have a story to tell and the artist clearly wouldn't have anything he'd want to draw.

Vigil first achieved some prominence in the four issues of the Silverwolf comic *Grips*, which seemed to be a showcase for the scathing psychoses of the title character who eviscerated anyone who disagreed with his worldview. But it's obvious that Vigil enjoys drawing such protracted, violent encounters as the brutal climax of *Faust* lasts ten pages and concludes with a severed head imagining what its funeral will be like!

Blood (or black ink, since this is, thankfully, a black and white comic) flows with all of the lunatic frenzy of the wildest scenes of *Evil Dead II: Dead By Dawn*, only here we're expected to take it all seriously. The title character, who is obviously inspired by the X-Men's Wolverine in appearance, style of fighting and trademarked retractile claws, is not satisfied in merely defeating a foe, he has to eviscerate them. He begins by getting one miscreant's attention by stabbing him through the nose and then up through the chin and out through the eyes. While

Vigil's talents as an artist are undeniable, he indulges in portraying the superficial aspects of violence while ignoring that the true emotional impact is internal and goes far deeper and is more complex than the portrayal of one madman rending the flesh of another. Tim Vigil and David Quinn are listed as the creators of this series, but it's clear that Quinn's script is merely pandering to the hot details that Vigil is eager to draw. Little doubt is left regarding that by the front cover (in color) showing *Faust* holding an extremely bloody severed head.

In his editorial, Publisher and Executive Editor Dan Madsen anticipates criticism of the book's violent nature by blankly referring to critics of the bloodletting as being closed minded. Perhaps, but speaking as a writer who has sold twenty comic book scripts in the past year (including five horror scripts), I've always felt that violence should come out of the story rather than the story being written with the violence being the goal and the *raison d'être*.

Northstar Publishing has another book forthcoming titled *Omega*, which is also drawn by Tim Vigil. Whether their intent is to tell good stories in an unrestricted fashion, or merely to indulge in thinly disguised juvenile, graphic fantasies which have no real point beyond the meticulous rendering of slice and dice murders, will be attested to by the material itself. If that's what fascinates you, though, it's out there, so gobble it up.

— James Van Hise





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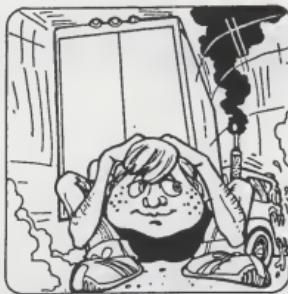
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SPECIALTY INSCRIBED AUTO-
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ALONE!"



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"I EVEN GOT TO BE IN ONE OF HIS MOVIES!"



"ONCE I WAS READING 'SOME-TIMES THEY COME BACK' WHEN SOMEONE PHONED TRYING TO SELL ME CEMETARY PLOTS!"



"I'LL BET IT WAS JUST BIG SIEVE PLAYING A PRANK!"



"DO YOU THINK THIS MEANS HE KNOWS WHERE I LIVE?"

letters

Dearest Jessie and James:

If someone had asked, I would've said the folks at *Midnight Graffiti* could not surpass their first issue anytime soon. With Mr. Ellison's powerful story, the piece by David Schow, and the stunning cover art by Martin Cannon to back me up, anyone would've been hard pressed to prove different.

Wrong.

Number Two came out firing from the hip with Steve Boyett's pyrotechnic "Emerald City Blues" and a cover graphic by Martin Cannon that is the best magazine art of 1988, bar none. Of course, all the unmentioned extras in both issues were icing on the cakes.

If your magazine doesn't continue to perdue and gain the groundswell of reader support it surely deserves, my faith in what's left of the literate masses will be utterly shattered.

And I'll be pissed, too, 'cause I'm renewing my subscription.

Love and Kisses,
D.T. Shindler

To Whom it may concern:

Your magazine is the worst collection of filth I have ever read. There wasn't a single article that didn't include obscenities or references to sexuality, perversion, violence, death or bodily functions. THESE THINGS SHOULD NOT BE PUBLICLY DISCUSSED!

I should know—

Sincerely,
Jimmy Swaggart

Dear Jessie,

Thanks for the copy of *Midnight Graffiti* #2. I didn't know that it existed, but its appearance is so nicely timed that I suspect a supernatural influence. You see, I am now marketing a 150,000 word novel, *Firefly*, that a publisher terms "Dark Fantasy." I didn't know what that was until I looked at your magazine. Also, I just received an expression of interest from a comic company, which I never heard of—until I saw your reviews of it.

Finally, my address for Steven Boyett is about four years out of date, and I suspect my last card didn't reach him. So I'll tell you instead: I regard him as one of the most promising upcoming writers, with a talent and insight that marks him for eventual greatness—if he can make it through a system that hates ornery and principled writers. Why do I feel such empathy? His story "Emerald City Blues" does nothing to diminish that impression.

So my best to you and to him, and may you both flourish in whatever weird way you are able to.

Harpy Holidays!
Piers Anthony

Dear Jessie,

This is to congratulate you on your publication of the story "Emerald City Blues." It certainly conveys the glory of war and the spirit of our fighting men. I think every red-blooded American should read it.

Sincerely,
John Tower





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